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The Letters and Poems of John Keats

John Keats, John Gilmer Speed, Richard
Monckton Milnes Houghton

1843 2.14 D



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THE LETTERS AND POEMS
OF
JOHN KEATS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



JOHN KEATS

FROM THE PAINTING IN OIL BY SEVERN



THE
LETTERS OF JOHN KEATS

EDITED BY

JNO. GILMER SPEED

"I THINK I SHALL BE AMONG THE ENGLISH POETS AFTER MY DEATH"



NEW-YORK
DODD, MEAD & COMPANY
1883

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
BY THE EDITOR TO THE MEMORY OF HIS MOTHER,
EMMA KEATS SPEED,
WHOSE PIOUS CARE PRESERVED THE MOST
VALUABLE OF THE MANUSCRIPTS
USED HEREIN.

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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT ten years ago I discovered, while examining the manuscripts of the letters written by John Keats to his brother George, who emigrated to America with his young wife in 1818, that the larger part of the letters were not included in that most excellent work of Lord Houghton's, "The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats." Questioning my mother, a daughter of George Keats and at the time the owner of the manuscripts, I learned that the originals had never been in Lord Houghton's hands, but that some of them, at his request, had been copied for him by the late Mr. John Jeffrey, who shortly after the death of George Keats became the husband of his widow. Mr. Jeffrey evidently exercised his own discretion in making selections from the letters, and just as evidently did not exercise a very wise discretion. This is very much to be regretted, for it was certainly due to Lord Houghton that everything in existence throwing any light whatever upon the brief life of John Keats should

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have been placed before him for his guidance, as it is rarely given to either mortals or immortals to have a biographer so sympathetic and at the same time so painstaking and eloquent.

I determined, after making this discovery, that I should, whenever I could find a few days of leisure, publish these letters in their entirety. That leisure has just come. I have been persuaded, however, to include all of the letters of Keats in this volume, and for that purpose I have not only transcribed the manuscripts preserved by my mother, but have borrowed from Lord Houghton's books the letters furnished to him by the literary friends and associates of Keats, and have also taken from the book published by Mr. Buxton Forman, Keats's letters to Fanny Brawne, the woman who inspired the poet with the great passion of his life, and who, ten years after his death, had so shallow an appreciation of his greatness that she wrote to Mr. Dilke: "The kindest act would be to let him rest forever in the obscurity to which circumstances have condemned him," though thirty-five years later, with mature commercial thrift, she bade her offspring to guard the letters carefully, "as they would some day be considered of value."

Few of the letters have dates, and it is impossible to arrange them chronologically, so that I have determined to classify them in this way: (1) "The letters to his brothers," (2) "The letters to his friends," (3) "The letters to Fanny Brawne," and (4) "Severn's account of the death of Keats." I trust that this arrangement will not detract from the value of the letters as side-lights upon the story of the

poet's life, but will answer the purpose quite as well as they would have done had I undertaken and succeeded in the impossible task of placing the letters in their correct chronological order.

Lord Houghton has inadvertently fallen into several errors of fact, which I am sure he will be glad to have me point out. In the first place, George Keats was not the elder of the brothers, being two years John's junior, as he was born in 1797, while the poet was born in 1795. It was only natural that such an error should have been made, as George Keats was larger and physically much stronger than either of his brothers; besides, being more of a man of affairs, and in practical things more self-reliant and enterprising. The affairs of the Keatses when George Keats emigrated to America were in anything but a prosperous condition. They had inherited from their father eight or ten thousand pounds. John Keats's education, however, had been expensive for a person in his condition of life, and Tom Keats's long illness was a great drain upon the small patrimony. To add to this, George Keats quarrelled with Mr. Abbey, the executor of the Keats estate, in whose counting-room he was employed, and resolved to seek his fortune in a more independent field. It is thus that John Keats wrote to his friend Bailey, in regard to George's determination to leave England:

You know my brother George has been out of employ for some time. It has weighed very much upon him, and driven him to scheme and turn over things in his mind. The result has been his determination to emigrate to the back settlements of America, become farmer, and work with his own hands,

after purchasing fourteen hundred acres of the American Government. This, for many reasons, has met with my entire consent,—and the chief one is this: he is of too independent and liberal a mind to get on in trade in this country, in which a generous man with a scanty resource must be ruined. I would sooner he should till the ground than bow to a customer. There is no choice with him: he could not bring himself to the latter. I could not consent to his going alone;—no; but that objection is done away with: he will marry, before he sets sail, a young lady he has known for several years, of a liberal nature, and high-spirited enough to follow him to the banks of the Mississippi.

As all the letters in this book show, John Keats had a very lively affection for his brother's wife, and it is thus that he wrote to Bailey of her after her marriage, and a few days before the young couple set sail for America:

I had known my sister-in-law some time before she was my sister, and was very fond of her. I like her better and better. She is the most disinterested woman I ever knew—that is to say, she goes beyond degrees in it. To see an entirely disinterested girl quite happy is the most pleasant and extraordinary thing in the world.

The second error I would point out—and I do this upon the authority of a marginal note in my grandmother's handwriting, made in her copy of Lord Houghton's book—is in regard to the color of Keats's hair and eyes. Lord Houghton says, upon the authority of a lady who remembers Keats at the time of Hazlitt's lectures: "His eyes were large and blue, his hair auburn. He wore it divided down the center, and it fell in rich masses on each side of his face. His mouth was full and less intel-

lectual than his other features. His countenance lives in my mind as one of singular beauty and brightness. It had an expression as if he had been looking on some glorious sight. The shape of his face had not the squareness of a man's, but more like some women's faces I have seen, it was so wide over the forehead and so small at the chin. He seemed in perfect health, and with life offering all things that were precious to him." My grandmother's note upon this is: "A mistake. His eyes were dark brown, almost black, large, soft, and expressive, and his hair was a golden red." As no other fault is found with the description given by Lord Houghton's informant, excepting in regard to the color of the eyes and hair, and judging by Severn's portrait, I fancy the description, with the exceptions noted, must be very good indeed.

Another error which Lord Houghton very naturally fell into was that of supposing that Fanny Brawne, for whom Keats had so unfortunate an attachment, was the East Indian of whom he wrote in a letter to George Keats and his wife:

She is not a Cleopatra, but is at least a Charmian. She has a rich Eastern look; she has fine eyes and fine manners. When she comes into the room she makes the same impression as the beauty of a leopardess, etc., etc.

This East Indian was not Fanny Brawne. The first mention I find of Fanny Brawne is in a letter in which he describes her in this way:

Shall I give you Miss Brawne? She is about my height, with a fine style of countenance of the lengthened sort; she

wants sentiment in every feature; she manages to make her hair look well; her nostrils are very fine, though a little painful; her mouth is bad and good; her profile is better than her full face, which, indeed, is not full, but pale and thin, without showing any bone; her shape is very graceful, and so are her movements; her arms are good, her hands badish, her feet tolerable. She is not seventeen, but she is ignorant; monstrous in her behaviour, flying out in all directions, calling people such names that I was forced lately to make use of the term,—Minx. This is, I think, from no innate vice, but from a penchant she has for acting stylishly.

This letter was written in December, 1818, about six months before the date of the first of the letters to Fanny Brawne; though, as I have pointed out in a foot-note to the passage where it occurs in the letter to his brother, he acknowledged to himself at the time this rather uncomplimentary letter was written that Miss Brawne had a great fascination for him. I take it for granted that no one who will care to read this book will care to be told anything more about Keats's love for Fanny Brawne than he himself tells in the painful and pathetic letters herein published.

I should like, however, to call attention to the fact that all of the letters and parts of letters now published for the first time were written after the coarse and brutal attack made by Gifford in the "Quarterly Review" upon "Endymion" and its author. If any reader of Lord Houghton's biography of Keats has any doubt left that his death was either caused or hastened by this attack of Gifford, these letters will certainly dispel such a doubt; for they show, not only that he was brave and hopeful when he wrote to his publisher, but that he ex-

pressed his confidence of his future as a poet in his most intimate correspondence with his brother.

In the "Phelobebbleon" for August, 1862, was published a part of a letter alleged to have been written by Keats to his sister-in-law. It is so obviously a forgery that I do not include it in this book.

MENDHAM, *November, 1883.*

J. G. S.





LETTERS TO HIS BROTHERS

No. I.

FEATHERSTONE BUILDINGS, Monday.

MY DEAR BROTHERS:

I ought to have written before, and you should have had a long letter last week, but I undertook the "Champion" for Reynolds, who is at Exeter. I wrote two articles, one on the Drury Lane pantomime, the other on the Covent Garden new tragedy, which they have not put in. The one they have inserted is so badly punctuated that, you perceive, I am determined never to write more without some care in that particular. Wells tells me that you are licking your chops, Tom, in expectation of my book coming out. I am sorry to say I have not begun my corrections yet: to-morrow I

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set out. I called on Sawrey this morning. He did not seem to be at all out at anything I said and the inquiries I made with regard to your spitting of blood, and moreover desired me to ask you to send him a correct account of all your sensations and symptoms concerning the palpitation and the spitting and the cough—if you have any. Your last letter gave me a great pleasure, for I think the invalid is in a better spirit there along the Edge; and as for George, I must immediately, now I think of it, correct a little misconception of a part of my last letter. The Miss Reynolds have never said one word against me about you, or by any means endeavoured to lessen you in my estimation. That is not what I referred to; but the manner and thoughts which I knew they internally had towards you, time will show. Wells and Severn dined with me yesterday. We had a very pleasant day. I pitched upon another bottle of claret. We enjoyed ourselves very much; were all very witty and full of rhyme. We played a concert from 4 o'clock till 10—drank your healths, the Hunts', and *N. B.* Severn, Peter Pendar's. I said on that day the only good thing I was ever guilty of. We were talking about Stephens and the Gallery. I said I wondered that careful folks would go there, for although it was but a shilling, still you had to pay through the Nose. I saw the Peachey family in a box at Drury one night. I have got such a curious,¹ or rather I had such, now I am in my own hand.

¹ A word is evidently omitted here.

I have had a great deal of pleasant time with Rice lately, and am getting initiated into a little band. They call drinking deep dyin' scarlet. They call good wine a pretty tippie, and call getting a child knocking out an apple; stopping at a tavern they call hanging out. Where do you sup? is where do you hang out?

Thursday I promised to dine with Wordsworth, and the weather is so bad that I am undecided, for he lives at Mortimer street. I had an invitation to meet him at Kingston's, but not liking that place I sent my excuse. What I think of doing to-day is to dine in Mortimer street (Wordsth), and sup here in the Feath^r buildings, as Mr. Wells has invited me. On Saturday, I called on Wordsworth before he went to Kingston's, and was surprised to find him with a stiff collar. I saw his spouse, and I think his daughter. I forget whether I had written my last before my Sunday evening at Haydon's—no, I did not, or I should have told you, Tom, of a young man you met at Paris, at Scott's, of the ——^r Richter. I think he is going to Fegan, in Africa; then to proceed if possible like Mungo Park. He was very polite to me, and inquired very particularly after you. Then there was Wordsworth, Lamb, Monkhouse, Landseer, Kingston, and your humble servant. Lamb got tipsy and blew up Kingston—proceeding so far as to take the candle across the room, hold it to his face, and show us what a soft fellow he was.

* Several words are here torn from the original.

I astonished Kingston at supper with a pertinacity in favour of drinking, keeping my two glasses at work in a knowing way. He sent me a hare last week, which I sent to Mrs. Dilke. Brown is not come back. I and Dilke are getting capital friends. He is going to take the "Champion." He has sent his farce to Covent Garden. I met Bob Harris on the steps at Covent Garden; we had a good deal of curious chat. He came out with his old humble opinion. The Covent Garden pantomime is a very nice one, but they have a middling Harlequin, a bad Pantaloon, a worse Clown, and a shocking Columbine, who is one of the Miss Dennets.

I suppose you will see my critique on the new tragedy in the next week's "Champion." It is a shocking bad one. I have not seen Hunt; he was out when I called. Mrs. Hunt looks as well as ever. I saw her after her confinement. There is an article in the "Examiner" on Godwin's "Mandeville," signed E. K. I think it Miss K—. I will send it. There are fine subscriptions going on for Hone.

You ask me what degrees there are between Scott's novels and those of Smollet. They appear to me to be quite distinct in every particular, more especially in their aims. Scott endeavours to throw so interesting and romantic a colouring into common and low characters as to give them a touch of the sublime. Smollet, on the contrary, pulls down and levels what with other men would continue romance. The grand parts of Scott are within the reach of more minds than the finest humours in

"Humphrey Clinker." I forget whether that fine thing of the Sargeant is Fielding or Smollet, but it gives me more pleasure than the whole novel of "The Antiquary." You must remember what I mean. Some one says to the Sargeant: "That's a non-sequiter!" "If you come to that," replies the Sargeant, "you're another!"

I see by Wells' letter Mr. Abbey does not overstock you with money. You must write. I have not seen —¹ yet, but expect it on Wednesday. I am afraid it is gone. Severn tells me he has an order for some drawings for the Emperor of Russia.

I was at a dance at Redhall's, and passed a pleasant time enough—drank deep, and won 10.6 at cutting for half guineas.* * * * * Bailey was there and seemed to enjoy the evening. Rice said he cared less about the hour than any one, and the proof is his dancing—he cares not for time, dancing as if he was deaf. Old Redhall not being used to

¹ The word is not legible, but he evidently referred to some play of the day.

* This letter was written in an evident hurry, and crossed. In many places it is almost illegible. At this particular place there is an account of a discussion as to the derivation of a word. Reynolds, Bailey, Keats, and others took part, and many witty things were said; but, under

all the circumstances and considering how many words I would have to leave to conjecture, I have concluded to omit the whole passage. It is to be regretted that this letter should have been so carelessly written, and I can only attribute the abandonment of Keats's usually distinct and almost clerical style of penmanship to great hurry and possible preoccupation.

give parties, had no idea of the quantity of wine that would be drank, and he actually put in readiness on the kitchen stairs eight dozen.

Every one inquires after you, and every one desires their remembrances to you. I have seen Fanny twice lately—she inquired particularly after you and wants a co-partnership letter from you. She has been unwell, but is improving—I think she will be quick well. Mrs. Abbey was saying that the Keatses were ever indolent, that they would ever be so, and that it is born in them. Well, whispered Fanny to me, if it is born with us, how can we help it. She seems very anxious for a letter. As I asked her what I should get for her, she said a “Medal of the Princess.” I called on Haslam—we dined very well. You must get well, Tom, and then I shall feel whole and genial as the winter air. Give me as many letters as you like, and write to Sawrey soon. I received a short letter from Bailey about Crips, and one from Haydon, ditto. Haydon thinks he improved very much. Mrs. Wells’ desires particularly to Tom and her respects to George, and I desire no better than to be ever your most affectionate brother,

JOHN.

No. 2.

HAMPSTEAD, 22d December, 1817.

MY DEAR BROTHERS:

I must crave your pardon for not having written ere this. * * * I saw Kean return to the public in "Richard III.," and finely he did it, and, at the request of Reynolds, I went to criticise his Duke. The critique is in to-day's "Champion," which I send you, with the "Examiner," in which you will find very proper lamentation on the obsolescence of Christmas gambols and pastimes; but it was mixed up with so much egotism of that driveling nature that all pleasure is entirely lost. Hone, the publisher's trial, you must find very amusing, and, as Englishmen, very encouraging: his *Not Guilty* is a thing, which not to have been, would have dulled still more Liberty's emblazoning. Lord Ellenborough has been paid in his own coin. Wooler and Hone have done us essential service. I have had two very pleasant evenings with Dilke, yesterday and to-day, and am at this moment just come from him, and feel in the humour to go on with this, begun in the morning, and from which he came to fetch me. I spent Friday evening with Wells, and went next morning to see "Death on the Pale Horse." It is a wonderful picture, when West's age is considered; but there is nothing to be in-

tense upon, no women one feels mad to kiss, no face swelling into reality. The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with beauty and truth. Examine "King Lear," and you will find this exemplified throughout: but in this picture we have unpleasantness without any momentous depths of speculation excited, in which to bury its repulsiveness. The picture is larger than "Christ Rejected."

I dined with Haydon the Sunday after you left, and had a very pleasant day. I dined too (for I have been out too much lately) with Horace Smith, and met his two brothers, with Hill and Kingston, and one Du Bois. They only served to convince me how superior humour is to wit, in respect to enjoyment. These men say things which make one start, without making one feel; they are all alike; their manners are alike; they all know fashionables; they have all a mannerism in their very eating and drinking, in their mere handling a decanter. They talked of Kean and his low company. "Would I were with that company instead of yours," said I to myself! I know such like acquaintance will never do for me, and yet I am going to Reynolds on Wednesday. Brown and Dilke walked with me and back from the Christmas pantomime. I had not a dispute, but a disquisition, with Dilke upon various subjects; several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a man of achievement, especially in literature, and which Shakspeare possessed so enor-

mously — I mean *negative capability*, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the penetralium of Mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration. Shelley's poem is out, and there are words about its being objected to as much as "Queen Mab" was. Poor Shelley, I think he has his quota of good qualities. . . . Write soon to your most sincere friend and affectionate brother,

JOHN.

No. 3.

23d January, 1818.

MY DEAR BROTHERS:

I was thinking what hindered me from writing so long, for I have so many things to say to you, and know not where to begin. It shall be upon a thing most interesting to you, my poem.* Well!

* Endymion.

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I have given the first book to Taylor; he seemed more than satisfied with it, and, to my surprise, proposed publishing it in quarto, if Haydon could make a drawing of some event therein, for a frontispiece. I called on Haydon. He said he would do anything I liked, but said he would rather paint a finished picture from it, which he seems eager to do. This, in a year or two, will be a glorious thing for us; and it will be, for Haydon is struck with the first book. I left Haydon, and the next day received a letter from him, proposing to make, as he says, with all his might, a finished chalk sketch of my head, to be engraved in the first style, and put at the head of my poem, saying, at the same time, he had never done the thing for any human being, and that it must have considerable effect, as he will put his name to it. I begin to-day to copy my second book: "thus far into the bowels of the land." You shall hear whether it will be quarto or non-quarto, picture or non-picture. Leigh Hunt I showed my first book to. He allows it not much merit as a whole; says it is unnatural, and made ten objections to it, in the mere skimming over. He says the conversation is unnatural, and too high-flown for brother and sister; says it should be simple,—forgetting, do ye mind, that they are both overshadowed by a supernatural Power, and of force could not speak like Francesca, in the "*Rimini*." He must first prove that Caliban's poetry is unnatural. This, with me, completely overturns his objections. The fact is, he and Shelley are hurt, and perhaps justly, at my not having showed them the affair officiously; and, from several hints I had had,

they appear much disposed to dissect and anatomize any trip or slip I may have made.—But who's afraid? Ay! Tom! Demme if I am. I went last Tuesday, an hour too late, to Hazlitt's lecture on Poetry; got there just as they were coming out, when all these pounced upon me:—Hazlitt, John Hunt and Son, Wells, Bewick, all the Landseers, Bob Harris, aye and more.

I think a little change has taken place in my intellect lately; I cannot bear to be uninterested or unemployed, I, who for so long a time have been addicted to passiveness. Nothing is finer for the purposes of great productions than a very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers. As an instance of this—observe—I sat down yesterday to read “King Lear” once again: the thing appeared to demand the prologue of a sonnet. I wrote it, and began to read. (I know you would like to see it.)

ON SITTING DOWN TO READ “KING LEAR” ONCE AGAIN.

O golden-tongued Romance with serene lute!
Fair plumed Syren! Queen! if far away!
Leave melodizing on this wintry day,
Shut up thine olden volume, and be mute.
Adieu! for once again the fierce dispute,
Betwixt Hell torment and impassioned clay,
Must I burn through; once more assay
The bitter sweet of this Shakspearian fruit.
Chief Poet! and ye clouds of Albion,
Begetters of our deep eternal theme,
When I am through the old oak forest gone,
Let me not wander in a barren dream,
But when I am consumed with the Fire,
Give me new Phoenix-wings to fly at my desire.

So you see I am getting at it with a sort of determination and strength, though, verily, I do not feel it at this moment: this is my fourth letter this morning, and I feel rather tired, and my head rather swimming — so I will leave it open till tomorrow's post.

I am in the habit of taking my papers to Dilke's and copying there; so I chat and proceed at the same time. I have been there at my work this evening, and the walk over the Heath takes off all sleep, so I will even proceed with you. * * * Constable, the bookseller, has offered Reynolds ten guineas a sheet to write for his magazine. It is an Edinburgh one, which Blackwood's started up in opposition to. Hunt said he was nearly sure that the "Cockney School" was written by Scott; so you are right, Tom! There are no more little bits of news I can remember at present.

I remain, my dear brothers, your affectionate brother,

JOHN.

No. 4.

HAMPSTEAD, February 16, 1818.

MY DEAR BROTHERS:

When once a man delays a letter beyond the proper time, he delays it longer, for one or two reasons; first, because he must begin in a very common-place style, that is to say, with an excuse; and secondly, things and circumstances become so jumbled in his mind, that he knows not what, or what not, he has said in his last. I shall visit you as soon as I have copied my poem all out. I am now much

beforehand with the printers; they have done none yet, and I am half afraid they will let half the season by before the printing. I am determined they shall not trouble me when I have copied it all. Hazlitt's last lecture was on Thomson, Cowper, and Crabbe. He praised Thomson and Cowper, but he gave Crabbe an unmerciful licking. I saw Fazio the first night; it hung rather heavily on me. I am in the high way of being introduced to a squad of people, Peter Pindar, Mrs. Opie, Mrs. Scott. Mr. Robinson, a great friend of Coleridge's, called on me. Richards tells me that my poems are known in the west country, and that he saw a very clever copy of verses headed with a motto from my sonnet to George. Honours rush so thickly upon me that I shall not be able to bear up against them. What think you—am I to be crowned in the Capitol? Am I to be made a Mandarin? No! I am to be invited, Mrs. Hunt tells me, to a party at Ollier's, to keep Shakspeare's birth-day. Shakspeare would stare to see me there. The Wednesday before last, Shelley, Hunt, and I wrote each a sonnet on the river Nile: some day you shall read them all. I saw a sheet of "Endymion," and have all reason to suppose they will soon get it done; there shall be nothing wanting on my part. I have been writing, at intervals, many songs and sonnets, and I long to be at Teignmouth to read them over to you; however, I think I had better wait till this book is off my mind; it will not be long first.

Reynolds has been writing two very capital articles, in the "Yellow Dwarf," on Popular Preachers.

Your most affectionate brother,

JOHN.

No. 5.

HAMPSTEAD, February 21, 1818.

MY DEAR BROTHERS:

I am extremely sorry to have given you so much uneasiness by not writing; however, you know good news is no news, or *vice versa*. I do not like to write a short letter to you, or you would have had one long before. The weather, although boisterous to-day, has been very much milder, and I think Devonshire is not the last place to receive a temperate change. I have been abominably idle ever since you left, but have just turned over a new leaf, and used as a marker a letter of excuse to an invitation from Horace Smith. I received a letter the other day from Haydon, in which he says his "Essays on the Elgin Marbles" are being translated into Italian, the which he superintends. I did not mention that I had seen the British Gallery; there are some nice things by Stark, and "Bathsheba," by Wilkie, which is condemned. I could not bear Alston's "Uriel."

The thrushes and blackbirds have been singing me into an idea that it was spring, and almost that leaves were on the trees. So that black clouds and boisterous winds seem to have mustered and collected in full divan, for the purpose of convincing me to the contrary. Taylor says my poem shall be out in a month. * * * The thrushes are singing now as if they would speak to the winds, because their big brother Jack—the Spring—was not far off. I am reading Voltaire and Gibbon,

although I wrote to Reynolds the other day to prove reading of no use. I have not seen Hunt since. I am a good deal with Dilke and Brown; they are kind to me. I don't think I could stop in Hampstead but for their neighborhood. I hear Hazlitt's lectures regularly: his last was on Gray, Collins, Young, &c., and he gave a very fine piece of discriminating criticism on Swift, Voltaire, and Rabelais. I was very disappointed at his treatment of Chatterton. I generally meet with many I know there. Lord Byron's fourth canto is expected out, and I heard somewhere, that Walter Scott has a new poem in readiness. * * * I have not yet read Shelley's poem: I do not suppose you have it yet at the Teignmouth libraries. These double letters must come rather heavy; I hope you have a moderate portion of cash, but don't fret at all, if you have not—Lord! I intend to play at cut and run as well as Falstaff, that is to say, before he got so lusty.

I remain, praying for your health, my dear brothers,

Your affectionate brother,

JOHN.

No. 6.

HAMPSTEAD, April 21, 1818.

MY DEAR BROTHERS:

I am certain, I think, of having a letter to-morrow morning; for I expected one so much this morning, having been in town two days, at the end

of which my expectations began to get up a little. I found two on the table, one from Bailey and one from Haydon. I am quite perplexed in a world of doubts and fancies; there is nothing stable in the world; uproar's your only music. I don't mean to include Bailey in this, and so I dismiss him from this, with all the opprobrium he deserves; that is, in so many words, he is one of the noblest men alive at the present day. In a note to Haydon, about a week ago (which I wrote with a full sense of what he had done, and how he had never manifested any little mean drawback in his value of me), I said, if there were three things superior in the modern world, they were "The Excursion," "Haydon's Pictures," and Hazlitt's depth of Taste. So I believe—not thus speaking with any poor vanity—that works of genius are the first things in this world. No! for that sort of probity and disinterestedness which such men as Bailey possess does hold and grasp the tip-top of any spiritual honors that can be paid to anything in this world. And, moreover, having this feeling at this present come over me in its full force, I sat down to write to you with a grateful heart, in that I had not a brother who did not feel and credit me for a deeper feeling and devotion for his uprightness, than for any marks of genius however splendid. I have just finished the revision of my first book, and shall take it to Taylor's to-morrow.

Your most affectionate brother,

JOHN.

After "Endymion" had been finished and published, and George Keats with his young wife had

of which my expectations began to get up a little. I have two on the table, one from Bailey and one from Hayden. I am much surprised in a world of sinners and sinners' sons, to find anything noble in the world, except your holy souls. I don't mean to make the matter in this, and so I dismiss him from me, with all the opposition he deserves; this is, in my many words, he is one of the noblest men that is at the present day. In a note to Hayden, I wrote a week ago, which I wrote with a full sense of what he had done, and how he had never manifested any kind mean drawback in his value of me, and that if there were three things superior to the common world, they were "The excursion," "Hayden's progress," and Hayden's depth of Truth. So I am sure — and thus thinking with my poor vanity of the works of genius and the first things in the world. Not for the sake of probity and distinction, which such men as Bailey possess does not and give any degree of any spiritual honour. And yet he is not to anything in this world. And, therefore, he is the best thing at the present time, and so in the end of it, I set down to write to you. I am glad to hear, in that I had not a brother who I did not feel, and could do for a degree feeling for him, much for his uprightness, than for any marks of his, however imperfect. I have just finished the revision of my first book, and shall take it in a few days to print.

Your most affectionate brother,

John.

John "Edmund" has been scolded and rebuked by his mother, from with his young wife and



TOM KEATS

FROM THE SKETCH IN WATER COLORS BY SEVERN

started for America, John Keats and his friend Mr. Brown went on a walking tour through the Lakes and Highlands. Several of the following letters, together with several to be found in a later chapter, consisting of "Keats's letters to his friends," contain a rambling journal of this excursion.

No. 7.

KESWICK, June 29, 1818.

MY DEAR TOM :

I cannot make my journal as distinct and actual as I could wish, from having been engaged in writing to George, and therefore I must tell you, without circumstance, that we proceeded from Ambleside to Rydal, saw the waterfalls there, and called on Wordsworth, who was not at home, nor was any one of his family. I wrote a note, and left it on the mantel-piece. Thence, on we came to the foot of Helvellyn, where we slept, but could not ascend it for the mist. I must mention that from Rydal we passed Thirlswater, and a fine pass in the mountains. From Helvellyn we came to Keswick on Derwent Water. The approach to Derwent Water surpassed Windermere; it is richly wooded, and shut in with rich-toned mountains. From Helvellyn to Keswick was eight miles to breakfast, after which we took a complete circuit of the lake, going about ten miles, and seeing on our way the fall of Lodore. I had an easy climb among the streams, about the fragments of rocks, and should have got,

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I think, to the summit, but unfortunately I was damped by slipping one leg into a squashy hole. There is no great body of water, but the accompaniment is delightful; for it oozes out from a cleft in perpendicular rocks, all fledged with ash and other beautiful trees. It is a strange thing how they got there. At the south end of the lake, the mountains of Borrowdale are perhaps as fine as anything we have seen. On our return from this circuit, we ordered dinner, and set forth about a mile and a half on the Penrith road, to see the Druid temple. We had a fag up hill, rather too near dinner time, which was rendered void by the gratification of seeing those aged stones on a gentle rise in the midst of the mountains, which at that time, darkened all round, except at the fresh opening of the vale of St. John. We went to bed rather fatigued, but not so much so as to hinder us getting up this morning to mount Skiddaw. It promised all along to be fair, and we had fagged and tugged nearly to the top, when, at half-past six, there came a mist upon us and shut out the view. We did not, however, lose anything by it: we were high enough without mist to see the coast of Scotland, the Irish Sea, the hills beyond Lancaster, and nearly all the large ones of Cumberland and Westmoreland, particularly Helvellyn and Scawfell. It grew colder and colder as we ascended, and we were glad, at about three parts of the way, to taste a little rum which the guide brought with him, mixed, mind ye, with mountain water. I took two glasses going and one returning. It is about six miles from where I am writing to the top; so we have walked ten

miles before breakfast to-day. We went up with two others, very good sort of fellows. All felt, on arising into the cold air, that same elevation which a cold bath gives one. I felt as if I were going to a tournament.

Wordsworth's house is situated just on the rise of the foot of Mount Rydal; his parlour-window looks directly down Windermere. I do not think I told you how fine the vale of Grassmere is, and how I discovered "the ancient woman seated on Helm Crag."

July 1st.— We are this morning at Carlisle. After Skiddaw, we walked to Treby, the oldest market town in Cumberland, where we were greatly amused by a country dancing-school, holden at the "Tun." It was indeed "no new cotillion fresh from France." No, they kickit and jumpit with meddle extraordinary, and whiskit, and friskit, and toed it, and go'd it, and twirl'd it, and whirl'd it, and stamped it, and sweated it, tattooing the floor like mad. The difference between our country dances and these Scottish figures is about the same as leisurely stirring a cup of tea and beating up a batter pudding. I was extremely gratified to think that if I had pleasures they knew nothing of, they had also some into which I could not possibly enter. I hope I shall not return without having got the Highland fling. There was as fine a row of boys and girls as you ever saw; some beautiful faces, and one exquisite mouth. I never felt so near the glory of patriotism, the glory of making, by any means, a country happier. This is what I like better than scenery. I fear our continued moving from place to place will pre-

vent our becoming learned in village affairs; we are mere creatures of rivers, lakes, and mountains. Our yesterday's journey was from Treby to Wigton, and from Wigton to Carlisle. The cathedral does not appear very fine; the castle is very ancient, and of brick. The city is very various; old, whitewashed, narrow streets, broad, red-brick ones, more modern. I will tell you anon whether the inside of the cathedral is worth looking at. It is built of sandy red stone or brick. We have now walked one hundred and fourteen miles, and are merely a little tired in the thighs, and a little blistered. We shall ride thirty-eight miles to Dumfries, when we shall linger awhile about Nithsdale and Galloway. I have written two letters to Liverpool. I found a letter from sister George; very delightful indeed: I shall preserve it in the bottom of my knapsack for you.

July 2d.

ON VISITING THE TOMB OF BURNS.

The town, the church-yard, and the setting sun,
The clouds, the trees, the rounded hills all seem,
Though beautiful, cold — strange — as in a dream,
I dreamed long ago, now new begun.
The short-lived, paly, Summer is but won
From Winter's ague, for one hour's gleam;
Though sapphire-warm, their stars do never beam:
All is cold Beauty; pain is never done:
For who has mind to relish, Minos-wise,
The Real of Beauty, free from that dead hue
Sickly imagination and sick pride
Cast wan upon it! Burns! with honour due
I oft have honour'd thee. Great shadow, hide
Thy face; I sin against thy native skies.

You will see by this sonnet that I am at Dumfries. We have dined in Scotland. Burns's tomb is in the church-yard corner, not very much to my taste, though on a scale large enough to show they wanted to honour him. Mrs. Burns lives in this place; most likely we shall see her to-morrow. This sonnet I have written in a strange mood, half asleep. I know not how it is, the clouds, the sky, the houses, all seem anti-Grecian and anti-Charlemagnish. I will endeavour to get rid of my prejudices and tell you fairly about the Scotch.

In Devonshire they say, "Well, where be ye going?" Here it is, "How is it wi' yoursel?" A man on the coach said the horses took a "hellish heap o' drivin"; the same fellow pointed out Burns's tomb with a deal of life—"There! de ye see it, amang the trees—white, wi' a roond tap?" The first well-dressed Scotchman we had any conversation with, to our surprise, confessed himself a deist. The careful manner of delivering his opinions, not before he had received several encouraging hints from us, was very amusing. Yesterday was an immense horse-fair at Dumfries, so that we met numbers of men and women on the road, the women nearly all barefoot, with their shoes and clean stockings in hand, ready to put on and look smart in the towns. There are plenty of wretched cottages whose smoke has no outlet but by the door. We have now begun upon whisky, called here "whuskey,"—very smart stuff it is. Mixed like our liquors, with sugar and water, 'tis called toddy; very pretty drink, and much praised by Burns.

No. 8.

AUCHTERCAIRN, 3d July, 1818.

MY DEAR TOM :

We are now in Meg Merrilies' country, and have this morning passed through some parts exactly suited to her. Kircudbright County is very beautiful, very wild, with craggy hills, somewhat in the Westmoreland fashion. We have come down from Dumfries to the sea-coast part of it. The following song you will have from Dilke, but perhaps you would like it here :—

Old Meg she was a gipsy,
And lived upon the moors ;
Her bed it was the brown heath turf,
And her house was out of doors.
Her apples were swart blackberries,
Her currants, pods o' broom ;
Her wine was dew of the wild white rose,
Her book a church-yard tomb.

Her brothers were the craggy hills,
Her sisters larchen trees ;
Alone with her great family
She lived as she did please.
No breakfast had she many a morn,
No dinner many a noon,
And, 'stead of supper, she would stare
Full hard against the moon.

But every morn, of woodbine fresh
She made her garlanding,
And, every night, the dark glen yew
She wove, and she would sing.

And with her fingers, old and brown,
She plaited mats of rushes,
And gave them to the cottagers
She met among the bushes.

Old Meg was brave as Margaret Queen,
And tall as Amazon,
An old red blanket cloak she wore,
A ship-hat had she on :
God rest her aged bones somewhere !
She died full long ago !

Yesterday was passed at Kircudbright; the country is very rich, very fine, and with a little of Devon. I am now writing at Newton Stewart, six miles from Wigton. Our landlady of yesterday said, "very few Southerners passed hereaways." The children jabber away, as if in a foreign language; the bare-footed girls look very much in keeping,—I mean with the scenery about them. Brown praises their cleanliness and appearance of comfort, the neatness of their cottages, &c. It may be. They are very squat among trees and fern, and heath and broom, on levels, slopes, and heights; but I wish they were as snug as those up the Devonshire valleys. We are lodged and entertained in great varieties. We dined yesterday on dirty bacon, dirtier eggs, and dirtiest potatoes, with a slice of salmon; we breakfast, this morning, in a nice carpeted room, with sofa, hair-bottomed chairs, and green-baized mahogany. A spring by the road-side is always welcome: we drink water for dinner, diluted with a gill of whisky.

July 6th.—Yesterday morning we set out for Glenluce, going some distance round to see some

rivers: they were scarcely worth the while. We went on to Stranraer, in a burning sun, and had gone about six miles when the mail overtook us: we got up, were at Port Patrick in a jiffey, and I am writing now in little Ireland. The dialects on the neighbouring shores of Scotland and Ireland are much the same, yet I can perceive a great difference in the nations, from the chamber-maid at this *nate Toone* kept by Mr. Kelly. She is fair, kind, and ready to laugh, because she is out of the horrible dominion of the Scotch Kirk. These Kirk-men have done Scotland good. They have made men, women, old men, young men, old women, young women, boys, girls, and all infants, careful; so that they are formed into regular phalanges of savers and gainers. Such a thrifty army cannot fail to enrich their country, and give it a greater appearance of comfort than that of their poor rash neighbourhood. These Kirk-men have done Scotland harm; they have banished puns, love, and laughing. To remind you of the fate of Burns: poor, unfortunate fellow! his disposition was southern! How sad it is when a luxurious imagination is obliged, in self-defence, to deaden its delicacy in vulgarity and in things attainable, that it may not have leisure to go mad after things that are not! No man, in such matters, will be content with the experience of others. It is true that out of suffering there is no dignity, no greatness, that in the most abstracted pleasure there is no lasting happiness. Yet, who would not like to discover, over again, that Cleopatra was a gipsy, Helen a rogue, and Ruth a deep one? I have not sufficient rea-

soning faculty to settle the doctrine of thrift, as it is consistent with the dignity of human society—with the happiness of cottagers; all I can do is by plump contrasts: were the fingers made to squeeze a guinea or a white hand?—were the lips made to hold a pen or a kiss? And yet, in cities, man is shut out from his fellows if he is poor; the cottager must be very dirty, and very wretched, if she be not thrifty. The present state of society demands this, and this convinces me that the world is very young and in a very ignorant state. We live in a barbarous age. I would sooner be a wild deer, than a girl under the dominion of the Kirk; and I would sooner be a wild hog, than be the occasion of a poor creature's penance before those execrable elders.

It is not so far to the Giant's Causeway as we supposed: we thought it seventy, and we hear it is only forty-eight miles; so we shall leave one of our knapsacks here at Donaghadee, take our immediate wants, and be back in a week, when we shall proceed to the county of Ayr. In the packet, yesterday, we heard some ballads from two old men. One was a romance, which seemed very poor; then there was "The Battle of the Boyne," then "Robin Huid," as they call him—"Before the king you shall go, go, go; before the king you shall go."

July 9th.—We stopped very little in Ireland; and that you may not have leisure to marvel at our speedy return to Port Patrick, I will tell you it is as dear living in Ireland as at the Hummums—thrice the expense of Scotland—it would have cost

us £15 before our return; moreover we found those forty-eight miles to be Irish ones, which reach to seventy English; so having walked to Belfast one day, and back to Donaghadee the next, we left Ireland with a fair breeze. We slept last night at Port Patrick, when I was gratified by a letter from you. On our walk in Ireland, we had too much opportunity to see the worse than nakedness, the rags, the dirt, and misery, of the poor common Irish. A Scotch cottage—though in that sometimes the smoke has no exit but at the door—is a palace to an Irish one. We had the pleasure of finding our way through a peat-bog, three miles long, at least—dreary, flat, dank, black, and spongy. Here and there were poor dirty creatures, and a few strong men cutting or carting peat. We heard, on passing into Belfast through a most wretched suburb, that most disgusting of all noises, worse than the bag-pipes, the laugh of a monkey, the chatter of women, the scream of macaw—I mean the sound of the shuttle. What a tremendous difficulty is the improvement of such people. I cannot conceive how a mind “with child” of philanthropy could grasp at its possibility—with me it is absolute despair. At a miserable house of entertainment, half-way between Donaghadee and Belfast, were two men sitting at whisky—one a laborer, and the other I took to be a drunken weaver: the laborer took me to be a Frenchman, and the other hinted at bounty-money, saying he was ready to take it. On calling for the letters at Port Patrick, the man snapped out, “What regiment?” On our return from Belfast, we met a sedan—the Duchess

of Dunghill. It is no laughing matter, though. Imagine the worst dog-kennel you ever saw placed upon two poles from a mouldy fencing. In such a wretched thing sat a squalid old woman, squat like an ape half-starved from a scarcity of biscuit in its passage from Madagascar to the Cape, with a pipe in her mouth, and looking out with a round-eyed, skinny-lidded inanity, with a sort of horizontal idiotic movement of her head: squat and lean she sat, and puffed out the smoke, while two ragged, tattered girls carried her along. What a thing would be a history of her life and sensations! I shall endeavour, when I have thought a little more, to give you my idea of the difference between the Scotch and Irish. The two Irishmen I mentioned were speaking of their treatment in England, when the weaver said, "Ah! you were a civil man, but I was a drinker."

Till further notice, you must direct to Inverness.

Your most affectionate brother,

JOHN.

No. 9.

DUNANCULLEN, July 23d, 1818.

MY DEAR TOM:

Just after my last had gone to the post, in came one of the men with whom we endeavoured to agree about going to Staffa: he said what a pity it was we should turn aside, and not see the curiosities. So we had a little tattle, and finally agreed that he should be our guide across the Isle of Mull. We

set out, crossed two ferries, one to the Isle of Kerrera, of little distance; the other from Kerrera to Mull, nine miles across. We did it in forty minutes, with a fine breeze. The road through the island, or rather track, is the most dreary you can think of; between dreary mountains, over bog, and rock, and river, with our breeches tucked up, and our stockings in hand. About eight o'clock we arrived at a shepherd's hut, into which we could scarcely get for the smoke, through a door lower than my shoulders. We found our way into a little compartment, with the rafters and turf-thatch blackened with smoke, the earth-floor full of hills and dales. We had some white bread with us, made a good supper, and slept in our clothes in some blankets; our guide snored in another little bed about an arm's length off. This morning we came about *sax* miles to breakfast, by rather a better path, and we are now in, by comparison, a mansion. Our guide is, I think, a very obliging fellow. In the way, this morning, he sang us two Gaelic songs—one made by a Mrs. Brown, on her husband's being drowned, the other a Jacobin one on Charles Stuart. For some days Brown has been inquiring out his genealogy here; he thinks his grandfather came from Long Island. He got a parcel of people round him at a cottage door last evening, chatted with one who had been a Miss Brown, and who, I think, from a likeness, must have been a relation: he jawed with the old woman, flattered a young one, and kissed a child, who was afraid of his spectacles, and finally drank a pint of milk. They handle his spectacles as we do a sensitive leaf.

July 26th.—Well! we had a most wretched walk of thirty-seven miles across the Island of Mull, and then we crossed to Iona, or Icolmkill; from Icolmkill we took a boat at a bargain to take us to Staffa, and land us at the head of Loch Nakeal, whence we should only have to walk half the distance to Oban again and by a better road. All this is well passed and done, with this singular piece of luck, that there was an interruption in the bad weather just as we saw Staffa, at which it is impossible to land but in a tolerably calm sea. But I will first mention Icolmkill. I know not whether you have heard much about this island; I never did before I came nigh it. It is rich in the most interesting antiquities. Who would expect to find the ruins of a fine cathedral church, of cloisters, colleges, monasteries, and nunneries, in so remote an island? The beginning of these things was in the sixth century, under the superstition of a would-be-bishop-saint, who landed from Ireland, and chose the spot for its beauty; for, at that time, the now treeless place was covered with magnificent woods. Columba in the Gaelic is Colm, signifying "dove"; "kill" signifies "church"; and I is as good as island: so I-columkill means the island of St. Columba's Church. Now this St. Columba became the Dominic of the Barbarian Christians of the North, and was famed also far South, but more especially was revered by the Scots, the Picts, the Norwegians, and the Irish. In a course of years, perhaps the island was considered the most holy ground of the north; and the old kings of the aforementioned nations chose it for their burial-place. We were shown a spot in

the church-yard where they say sixty-one kings are buried; forty-eight Scotch, from Fergus II. to Macbeth; eight Irish; four Norwegians; and one French. They lay in rows compact. Then we were shown other matters of later date, but still very ancient; many tombs of Highland chieftains—their effigies in complete armour, face upward, black, and moss-covered; abbots and bishops of the island, always of the chief clans. There were plenty Macleans and Macdonalds; among these latter the famous Macdonald, Lord of the Isles. There have been three hundred crosses in the island, but the Presbyterian destroyed all but two, one of which is a very fine one, and completely covered with a shaggy, coarse moss. The old school-master, an ignorant little man, but reckoned very clever, showed us these things. He is a Maclean, and as much above four feet as he is under four feet three inches. He stops at one glass of whisky, unless you press another, and at the second, unless you press a third.

I am puzzled how to give you an idea of Staffa. It can only be represented by a first rate drawing. One may compare the surface of the island to a roof; this roof is supported by grand pillars of basalt, standing together as thick as honeycomb. The finest thing is Fingal's Cave. It is entirely a hollowing out of basalt pillars. Suppose, now, the giants who rebelled against Jove had taken a whole mass of black columns and bound them together like bunches of matches, and then, with immense axes, had made a cavern in the body of these columns. Of course the roof and floor must

be composed of the ends of these columns. Such is Fingal's Cave, except that the sea has done the work of excavation, and is continually dashing there. So that we walk along the sides of the cave, on the pillars which are left, as if for convenient stairs. The roof is arched somewhat Gothic-wise, and the length of some of the entire side-pillars is fifty feet. About the island you might seat an army of men, each on a pillar. The length of the cave is 120 feet, and from its extremity the view into the sea, through the large arch at the entrance, is sublime. The colour of the columns is black, with a lurking gloom of purple therein. For solemnity and grandeur, it far surpasses the finest cathedrals. At the extremity of the cave there is a small perforation into another cave, at which, the waters meeting and buffeting each other, there is sometimes produced a report as if of a cannon, heard as far as Iona, which must be twelve miles. As we approached in the boat, there was such a fine swell of the sea that the pillars appeared immediately arising from the crystal. But it is impossible to describe it.

Not Aladdin magian
Ever such a work began ;
Not the wizard of the Dee
Ever such a dream could see ;
Not St. John, in Patmos' isle,
In the passion of his toil,
When he saw the churches seven,
Golden aisled, built up in heaven,
Gazed at such a rugged wonder! —
As I stood its roofing under,
Lo! I saw one sleeping there,

On the marble cold and bare;
While the surges washed his feet,
And his garments white did beat,
Drenched about the sombre rocks;
On his neck his well-grown locks,
Lifted dry above the main,
Were upon the curl again.
“What is this? and what art thou?”
Whispered I, and touch’d his brow;
“What art thou? and what is this?”
Whispered I, and strove to kiss
The spirit’s hand, to wake his eyes;
Up he started in a trice:
“I am Lycidas,” said he,
“Fam’d in fun’ral minstrelsy!
This was architectur’d thus
By the great Oceanus!—
Here his mighty waters play
Hollow organs all the day;
Here, by turns, his dolphins all,
Finny palmers, great and small,
Come to pay devotion due,—
Each a mouth of pearls must strew!
Many a mortal of these days,
Dares to pass our sacred ways;
Dares to touch, audaciously,
This cathedral of the sea!
I have been the pontiff-priest,
Where the waters never rest,
Where a fledgy sea-bird choir
Soars for ever! Holy fire
I have hid from mortal man;
Proteus is my Sacristan!
But the dulled eye of mortal
Hath passed beyond the rocky portal;
So for ever will I leave
Such a taint, and soon unweave
All the magic of the place.”
So saying, with a Spirit’s glance,
He dived!

I am sorry I am so indolent as to write such stuff as this. It can't be helped.

The western coast of Scotland is a most strange place; it is composed of rocks, mountains, mountainous and rocky islands, intersected by lochs; you can go but a short distance any where from salt-water in the Highlands.

I assure you I often long for a seat and a cup o' tea at Well Walk, especially now that the mountains, castles, and lakes are becoming common to me. Yet I would rather summer it out, for on the whole I am happier than when I have time to be glum: perhaps it may cure me. Immediately on my return I shall begin studying hard, with a peep at the theatre now and then. I have a slight sore throat, and think it better to stay a day or two at Oban: then we shall proceed to Fort William and Inverness. Brown, in his letters, puts down every little circumstance; I should like to do the same, but I confess myself too indolent, and besides, next winter they will come up in prime order as we speak of such and such things.

Remember me to all, including Mr. and Mrs. Bentley. Your most affectionate brother,

JOHN.

No. 10.

TO MRS. WYLIE, THE MOTHER OF HIS SISTER-IN-LAW.

INVERNESS, August 6, 1818.

MY DEAR MADAM:

It was a great regret to me that I should leave all my friends, just at the moment when I might

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have helped to soften away the time for them. I wanted not to leave my brother Tom, but more especially, believe me, I should like to have remained near you, were it but for an atom of consolation after parting with so dear a daughter. My brother George has ever been more than a brother to me; he has been my greatest friend, and I can never forget the sacrifice you have made for his happiness. As I walk along the mountains here I am full of these things, and lay in wait, as it were, for the pleasure of seeing you immediately on my return to town. I wish, above all things, to say a word of comfort to you, but I know not how. It is impossible to prove that black is white; it is impossible to make out that sorrow is joy, or joy is sorrow.

Tom tells me that you called on Mrs. Haslam, with a newspaper giving an account of a gentleman in a fur cap falling over a precipice in Kircudbrightshire. If it was me, I did it in a dream, or in some magic interval between the first and second cup of tea; which is nothing extraordinary when we hear that Mahomet, in getting out of bed, upset a jug of water, and whilst it was falling, took a fortnight's trip, as it seemed, to Heaven; yet was back in time to save one drop of water being spilt. As for fur caps, I do not remember one beside my own, except at Carlisle: this was a very good fur cap I met in High-street, and I dare say was the unfortunate one. I dare say that the Fates, seeing but two fur caps in the north, thought it too extraordinary, and so threw the dies which of them should be drowned. The lot fell upon Jones: I

dare say his name was Jones. All I hope is that the gaunt ladies said not a word about hanging; if they did I shall repeat that I was not half-drowned in Kircudbright. Stop! let me see!—being half-drowned by falling from a precipice is a very romantic affair: why should I not take it to myself? How glorious to be introduced in a drawing-room to a lady who reads novels, with “Mr. So-and-so—Miss So-and-so; Miss So-and-so, this is Mr. So-and-so, who fell off a precipice and was half-drowned.” Now I refer to you, whether I should lose so fine an opportunity of making my fortune. No romance lady could resist me—none. Being run under a wagon, side-lamed in a play-house, apoplectic through brandy, and a thousand other tolerably decent things for badness, would be nothing; but being tumbled over a precipice into the sea—oh! it would make my fortune—especially if you could continue to hint, from this bulletin’s authority, that I was not upset on my own account, but that I dashed into the waves after Jessy of Dumblane, and pulled her out by the hair;—but that, alas! she was dead, or she would have made me happy with her hand. However, in this you may use your own discretion. But I must leave joking, and seriously aver that I have been very romantic indeed among these mountains and lakes. I have got wet through, day after day; eaten oat-cake and drank whisky; walked up to my knees in bog; got a sore throat; gone to see Icolmkill and Staffa; met with unwholesome food, just here and there, as it happened; went up Ben Nevis, and—N. B., came down again: sometimes, when I am rather

tired, I lean rather languishingly on a rock, and long for some famous beauty to get down from her palfrey in passing, approach me, with — her saddlebags, and give me — a dozen or two capital roast-beef sandwiches.

When I come into a large town, you know there is no putting one's knapsack into one's fob, so the people stare. We have been taken for spectacle-venders, razor-sellers, jewelers, traveling linen-draper, spies, excisemen, and many things I have no idea of. When I asked for letters at Port Patrick, the man asked, "What regiment?" I have had a peep also at little Ireland. Tell Henry I have not camped quite on the bare earth yet, but nearly as bad in walking through Mull; for the shepherds' huts you can scarcely breathe in for the smoke, which they seem to endeavour to preserve for smoking on a large scale.

I assure you, my dear madam, that one of the greatest pleasures I shall have on my return, will be seeing you, and that I shall ever be

Yours, with the greatest respect and sincerity,
JOHN KEATS.

No. II.

OCTOBER 29, 1818.

MY DEAR GEORGE:

There was a part in your letter which gave me great pain; that where you lament not receiving letters from England. I intended to have written immediately upon my return from Scotland (which

was two months earlier than I intended, on account of my own, as well as Tom's health), but then I was told by Mrs. Wylie[†] that you had said you did not wish any one to write till we had heard from you. This I thought odd, and now I know it could not have been so. Yet at the time I suffered my unreflecting head to be satisfied, and went on in that sort of careless and restless life with which you are well acquainted. I am grieved to say that I am not sorry you had not letters at Philadelphia; you could have had no good news of Tom; and I have been withheld from beginning these many days. I could not bring myself to say the truth, that he is no better, but much worse; however, it must be told, and you, my dear brother and sister, take example from me and bear up against any calamity, for my sake as I do for yours. Ours are ties which, independent of their own sentiment, are sent us by Providence, to prevent the effects of one great solitary grief. I have Fanny,^{*} and I have you—three people whose happiness to me is sacred, and it does annul that selfish sorrow which I should otherwise fall into, living as I do with poor Tom, who looks upon me as his only comfort. The tears will come

[†] The mother of George Keats's wife.

^{*} Fanny Keats, his sister. She married Señor Llanos, a Spanish gentleman of liberal politics and great talent. He was the author of "Don Esteban," "Sandoval, the Freemason," and other romantic illustrations of the modern history of the Peninsula. He was not many years ago Minister of the Spanish Republic to the Court of Rome. One of the sons, Juan Llanos y Keats, is a painter who has won much fame in Spain. Mme. Llanos is still living in Madrid.

into your eyes; let them, and embrace each other: thank Heaven for what happiness you have, and after thinking a moment or two that you suffer in common with all mankind, hold it not a sin to regain your cheerfulness.

Your welfare is a delight to me which I cannot express. The moon is now shining full and brilliant; she is the same to me in matter that you are in spirit. If you were here, my dear sister, I could not pronounce the words which I can write to you from a distance. I have a tenderness for you and an admiration which I feel to be as great and more chaste than I have for any woman in the world. You may mention Fanny—her character is not formed; her identity does not press upon me as yours does. I hope from the bottom of my heart that I may one day feel as much for her as I do for you.

I know not how it is, my dear brother, I have never made any acquaintance of my own—nearly all through your medium; through you I know not only a sister but a glorious human being. And now I am talking of those to whom you have made me, I cannot forbear mentioning Haslam as a most kind and obliging and constant friend. His behaviour to Tom during my absence and since my return has endeared him to me forever, besides his anxiety about you.

To-morrow I shall call on your mother* and exchange information with her. I intend to write you such columns that it will be impossible for me to keep any order or method in what I write; that

* Mrs. Wylie.

will come first which is uppermost in my mind; not that which is uppermost in my heart. Besides, I should wish to give you a picture of our lives here, whenever by a touch I can do it.

I came by ship from Inverness, and was nine days at sea without being sick. A little qualm now and then put me in mind of you. However, as soon as you touch the shore, all the horrors of sickness are soon forgotten, as was the case with a lady on board, who could not hold her head up all the way. We had not been in the Thames an hour before her tongue began to some tune — paying off, as it was fit she should, all old scores. I was the only Englishman on board. There was a downright Scotchman, who, hearing that there had been a bad crop of potatoes in England, had brought some triumphant specimens from Scotland. These he exhibited with natural pride to all the ignorant lightermen and watermen from the Nore to the Bridge. I fed upon beef all the way, not being able to eat the thick porridge which the ladies managed to manage, with large, awkward horn spoons into the bargain.

Reynolds has returned from a six weeks' enjoyment in Devonshire; he is well, and persuades me to publish my "Pot of Basil" as an answer to an attack made on me in "Blackwood's Magazine" and the "Quarterly Review." There have been two letters in my defence in the "Chronicle," and one in the "Examiner," copied from the Exeter paper, and written by Reynolds. I don't know who wrote those in the "Chronicle." This is a mere matter of the moment: I think I shall be among the English

See vol. III. p. 25.

poets after my death. Even as a matter of present interest, the attempt to crush me in the "Quarterly" has only brought me more into notice, and it is a common expression among book-men, "I wonder the 'Quarterly' should cut its own throat!" It does me not the least harm in society to make me appear little and ridiculous: I know when a man is superior to me, and give him all due respect. He will be the last to laugh at me; and as for the rest, I feel that I make an impression on them which ensures me personal respect while I am in sight, whatever they may say when my back is turned.

The Misses — are very kind to me, but they have lately displeased me much, and in this way: — Now I am coming the Richardson! — On my return, the first day I called, they were in a sort of taking or bustle about a cousin of theirs, who, having fallen out with her grandpapa in a serious manner, was invited by Mrs. — to take asylum in her house. She is an East Indian,² and ought to be her grandfather's heir. At the time I called, Mrs. — was in conference with her upstairs, and the young ladies were warm in her praise downstairs, calling her genteel, interesting, and a thousand other pretty things, to which I gave no heed, not being partial to nine days' wonders. Now all is completely changed: they hate her, and from what I hear she is not without faults of a real kind; but she has others, which are more apt to make

² This was not intended of Keats's biographers. Fanny Brawne was not an East Indian, as supposed by all.

women of inferior claims hate her. She is not a Cleopatra, but is at least a Charmian: she has a rich Eastern look; she has fine eyes and fine manners. When she comes into the room she makes the same impression as the beauty of a leopardess. She is too fine and too conscious of herself to repulse any man who may address her; from habit, she thinks that *nothing particular*. I always find myself more at ease with such a woman; the picture before me always gives me a life and animation which I cannot possibly feel with anything inferior. I am at such times too much occupied in admiring to be awkward or in a tremble: I forget myself entirely, because I live in her. You will by this time think I am in love with her, so, before I go any further, I will tell you I am not. She kept me awake one night, as a tune of Mozart's might do. I speak of the thing as a pastime and an amusement, than which I can feel none deeper than a conversation with an imperial woman, the very "yes" and "no" of whose life is to me a banquet. I don't cry to take the moon home with me in my pocket, nor do I fret to leave her behind me. I like her and her like, because one has no *sensations*: what we both are is taken for granted. You will suppose I have, by this, had much talk with her—no such thing; there are the Misses——on the lookout. They think I don't admire her because I don't stare at her; they call her a flirt to me—what a want of knowledge! She walks across a room in such a manner that a man is drawn towards her with a magnetic power. This they call flirting! They do not know things; they do not

know what a woman is. I believe, though, she has faults, the same as Charmian or Cleopatra might have had. Yet she is a fine thing, speaking in a worldly way; for there are two distinct tempers of mind in which we judge of things—the worldly, theatrical, and pantomimical; and the un-earthly, spiritual, and ethereal. In the former, Bonaparte, Lord Byron, and this Charmian hold the first place in our minds; in the latter, John Howard, Bishop Hooker, rocking his child's cradle, and you, my dear sister, are the conquering feelings. As a man of the world, I love the rich talk of a Charmian; as an eternal being, I love the thought of you. I should like her to ruin me, and I should like you to save me.

“I am free from men of pleasure's cares,
By dint of feelings far more deep than theirs.”

This is Lord Byron, and one of the finest things he has said.

I have no town talk for you; as for politics, they are in my opinion only sleepy because they will soon be wide awake. Perhaps not; for the long-continued peace of England has given us notions of personal safety which are likely to prevent the reëstablishment of our national honesty. There is of a truth nothing manly or sterling in any part of the Government. There are many madmen in the country, I have no doubt, who would like to be beheaded on Tower Hill merely because of the sake of *éclat*; there are many men who like Hunt, from a principle of taste, would like to see things go on

better ; there are many like Sir F. Burdett, who like to sit at the head of political dinners,—but there are none prepared to suffer in obscurity for their country. The motives of our worst men are interest, and of our best, vanity ; we have no Milton or Algernon Sidney. Governors in these days lose the title of man in exchange for that of diplomate or minister. We breathe a sort of official atmosphere. All the departments of the Government have strayed far from simplicity, which is the greatest of strength. There is as much difference in this, between the present Government and Oliver Cromwell's, as there is between the Twelve Tables of Rome and the volumes of Civil Law digested by Justinian. A man now entitled Chancellor has the same honour paid him whether he be a hog or a Lord Bacon. No sensation is created by greatness, but by the number of Orders a man has at his buttonhole. Notwithstanding the noise the Liberals make in the cause of Napoleon, I cannot but think he has done more harm to the life of Liberty than any one else could have done. Not that the Divine Right gentlemen have done or intend to do any good—no, they have taken the lesson of him, and will do all the further harm he would have done, without any of the good. The worst thing he has taught them is how to organize their monstrous armies. The Emperor Alexander, it is said, intends to divide his empire, as did Dioclesian, creating two czars besides himself, and continuing supreme monarch of the whole. Should he do so, and they for a series of years keep peaceable among themselves, Russia may spread her conquest even

to China. I think it a very likely thing that China may fall of itself; Turkey certainly will. Meanwhile European North Russia will hold its horn against the rest of Europe, intriguing constantly with France.

Dilke,² whom you know to be a Godwin-perfectibility man, pleases himself with the idea that America will be the country to take up the march of the human intellect where England leaves off. I differ there with him greatly: a country like the United States, whose greatest men are Franklins and Washingtons, will never do that: they are great men, doubtless; but how are they to be compared to these, our countrymen, Milton and the two Sidneys? The one is a philosophical Quaker, full of mean and thrifty maxims; the other sold the very charger who had taken him through all his battles. These Americans are great, but they are not sublime, men; the humanity of the United States can never reach the sublime. Birkbeck's mind is too much in the American style; you must endeavour to enforce a little spirit of another sort into the settlement,—always with great caution; for thereby you may do your descendants more good than you may imagine. If I had a prayer to make for any great good, next to Tom's recovery, it should be that one of your children should be the first American poet. I have a great mind to make a proph-

² Dilke was the founder of the "London Athenæum," the father of the first baronet, Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke, of whom, by the way, as a boy several allusions will be found in these letters. Keats's friend was the grandfather of the present Sir Charles Dilke.

ecy; and they say prophecies work out their own fulfilment.

'Tis the witching hour of night,
Orbed is the moon and bright,
And the stars they glisten, glisten,
Seeming with bright eyes to listen —

For what listen they?
For a song and for a charm,
See they glisten in alarm,
And the moon is waxing warm
To hear what I shall say.

Moon, keep wide thy golden ears —
Hearken, stars! and hearken, spheres! —
Hearken; thou eternal sky!

I sing an infant's lullaby,

A pretty lullaby.

Listen, listen, listen, listen,
Glisten, glisten, glisten, glisten,

And hear my lullaby!

Though the rushes that will make
Its cradle still are in the lake —

Though the linen that will be
Its swathe is on the cotton tree —

Though the woollen that will keep
It warm is on the silly sheep —

Listen, starlight, listen, listen,
Glisten, glisten, glisten, glisten,

And hear my lullaby!

Child, I see thee! Child, I've found thee
Midst of the quiet all around thee!

Child, I see thee! Child, I spy thee!

And thy mother sweet is nigh thee!

Child, I know thee! Child no more,

But a poet evermore!

See, see, the lyre, the lyre,

In a flame of fire,

Upon the little cradle's top

Flaring, flaring, flaring,

Past the eyesight's bearing.
 Awake it from its sleep,
 And see if it can keep
 Its eyes upon the blaze —
 Amaze, amaze!
 It stares, it stares, it stares,
 It dares what no one dares!
 It lifts its little hand into the flame
 Unharmed, and on the strings
 Paddles a little tune and sings,
 With dumb endeavour sweetly —
 Bard art thou completely!
 Little child
 O' th' western wild,
 Bard art thou completely!
 Sweetly with dumb endeavour,
 A poet now or never,
 Little child
 O' th' western wild,
 A poet now or never!

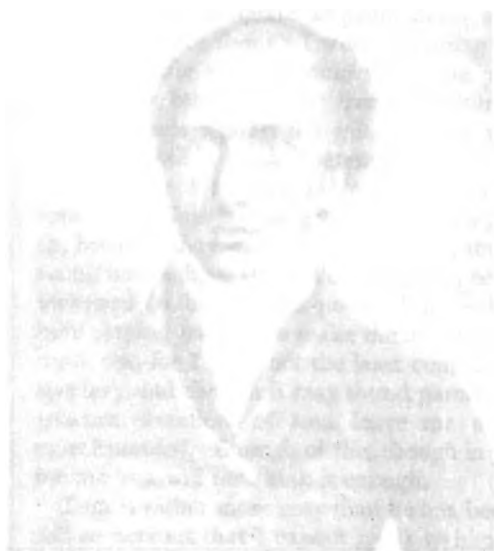
Notwithstanding your happiness and your recommendations, I hope I shall never marry: though the most beautiful creature were waiting for me at the end of a journey or a walk; though the carpet were of silk and the curtains of the morning clouds, the chairs and sofas stuffed with cygnet's down, the food manna, the wine beyond claret, the window opening on Windermere,—I should not feel, or rather my happiness should not be, so fine. My solitude is sublime—for, instead of what I have described, there is a sublimity to welcome me home. The roaring of the wind is my wife and the stars through my window-panes are my children; the mighty abstract idea of beauty in all things, I have, stifles the more divided and minute domestic happiness.

An amiable wife and sweet children I contemplate as part of that beauty, but I must have a thousand of these beautiful particles to fill up my heart. I feel more and more every day as my imagination strengthens that I do not live in this world alone, but in a thousand worlds. No sooner am I alone than shapes of epic greatness are stationed around me, and serve my spirit the office which is equivalent to a king's body-guard: "Then Tragedy with sceptr'd pall comes sweeping by." According to my state of mind, I am with Achilles shouting in the trenches, or with Theocritus in the vales of Sicily; or throw my whole being into Troilus, and repeating these lines, "I wander like a lost soul upon the Stygian bank, staying for waftage." I melt into the air with a voluptuousness so delicate that I am content to be alone. These things, combined with the opinion I have formed of the generality of women, who appear to me as children, to whom I would rather give a sugar-plum than my time, form a barrier against matrimony, which I rejoice in.² I have written this that you might see that I have my share of the highest pleasures of life, and that though I may choose to pass my days alone, I shall be no solitary; you see there is nothing splenetic in all this. The only thing that can affect me personally for more than one short passing day is any doubts about my powers for poetry: I seldom have any, and I look with the hope to the nighting time when I shall have none. I am as happy as a man

² It was about six months from the date of this letter that he began to be haunted by "the voice and shape of a woman," and that woman, of course, was Fanny Brawne.

can be—that is, in myself; I should be happier if Tom were well, and if I knew you were passing pleasant days. Then I should be most enviable—with the yearning passion I have for the beautiful connected and made one with the ambition of my intellect. Think of my pleasures in solitude in comparison with my commerce with the world: there I am a child; there they do not know me, not even my most intimate acquaintance. I give into their feelings as though I were refraining from imitating a little child. Some think me meddling, others silly, others foolish; every one thinks he sees my weak side against my will, when in truth it is with my will. I am content to be thought all this, because I have in my own breast so great a resource. This is one great reason they like me so, because they can all show to advantage in a room, and eclipse (from a certain tact) one who is reckoned to be a good poet. I hope I am not here playing tricks “to make the angels weep.” I think not, for I have not the least contempt for my species; and though it may sound paradoxical, my greatest elevations of soul leave me every time more humbled. Enough of this, though in your love for me you will not think it enough.

Tom is rather more easy than he has been, but is still so nervous that I cannot speak to him of you; indeed, it is the care I have had to keep his mind aloof from feelings too acute that has made this letter so rambling. I did not like to write before him a letter he knew was to reach your hands; I cannot even now ask him for any message; his heart speaks to you.





GEORGE KEATS

FROM THE MINIATURE ON IVORY BY SEVERN

Be as happy as you can, and believe me, dear brother and sister, your anxious and affectionate brother,

JOHN.

This is my birthday.

No. 12.

DECEMBER, 1818.

MY DEAR BROTHER AND SISTER :

You will have been prepared before this reaches you for the worst news you could hear ; nay, if Haslam's letter arrived in proper time I have a consolation in thinking the first shock will be passed before you receive this. The last days of poor Tom were of the most distressing nature ; but his last moments were not so painful, and his very last was without a pang. I will not enter into any parsonic comments on death. Yet the commonest observations of the commonest people on death are true as their proverbs. I have a firm belief in immortality, and so had Tom.

During poor Tom's illness I was not able to write, and since his death the task of beginning has been a hindrance to me. Within this last week I have been everywhere, and I will tell you, as nearly as possible, how I go on. I am going to domesticate with Brown ; that is, we shall keep house together. I shall have the front parlour, and he the back one, by which I shall avoid the noise of Bentley's children and be able to go on with my studies, which have been greatly interrupted lately, so that I have not the shadow of an idea of a book in my

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head, and my pen seems to have grown gouty for verse. How are you going on now? The going on of the world makes me dizzy. There you are with Birkbeck, here I am with Brown; sometimes I imagine an immense separation, and sometimes, as at present, a direct communication of spirit with you. That will be one of the grandeurs of immortality. There will be no space, and consequently the only commerce between spirits will be by their intelligence of each other — when they will completely understand each other, while we in this world merely comprehend each other in different degrees; the higher the degree of good, so higher is our love and friendship. I have been so little used to writing lately that I am afraid you will not smoke my meaning, so I will give you an example. Suppose Brown or Haslam, or any one else, whom I understand in the next degree to what I do you, were in America, they would be so much the further from me in proportion as their identity was more impressed upon me. Now, the reason why I do not feel at the present moment so far from you is that I remember your ways and manners and actions; I know your manner of thinking, your manner of feeling; I know what shape your joy or your sorrow would take; I know the manner of your walking, standing, sauntering, sitting down, laughing, punning, and every action, so truly that you seem near to me. You will remember me in the same manner, and the more when I tell you that I shall read a page of Shakspeare every Sunday at ten o'clock: you read one at the same time, and we shall be as

near each other as blind bodies can be in the same room.

Thursday.—This morning is very fine. What are you doing this morning? Have you a clear hard frost as we have? How do you come on with the gun? Have you shot a buffalo? Have you met with any pheasants? My thoughts are frequently in a foreign country. I live more out of England than in it. The mountains of Tartary are a favourite lounge, if I happen to miss the Alleghany ridge or have no whim for Savoy. There must be great pleasure in pursuing game—pointing your gun—no, it won't do—now—no—rabbit it—now, bang—smoke and feathers—where is it? Shall you be able to get a good pointer or so? Now I am not addressing myself to G. Minor—and yet I am, for you are one. Have you some warm furs? By your next letter I shall expect to hear exactly how you get on; smother nothing; let us have all—fair and foul—all plain. Will the little bairn have made his entrance before you have this? Kiss it for me, and when it can first know a cheese from a caterpillar show it my picture twice a week. You will be glad to hear that Gifford's attack upon me has done me service—it has got my book among several *sets*. Nor must I forget to mention once more, what I suppose Haslam has told you, the present of a £25 note I had anonymously sent me. Another pleasing circumstance I may mention, on the authority of Mr. Neville, to whom I sent a copy of "Endymion." It was lying on his cousin's table, where it had been seen by one of the Misses Porter

See p. 55-56.

(of romance celebrity), who expressed a wish to read it. After having dipped into it, in a day or two she returned it, accompanied by the following letter:

“DEAR SIR :

“As my brother is sending a messenger to Esher, I cannot but make the same the bearer of my regrets for not having had the pleasure of seeing you the morning you called at the gate. I had given orders to be denied, I was so very unwell with my still adhesive cold; but had I known it was you, I should have broken off the interdict for a few minutes, to say how very much I am delighted with ‘Endymion.’ I had just finished the poem, and have now done as you permitted — lent it to Miss Fitzgerald.

“I regret you are not personally acquainted with the author, for I should have been happy to have acknowledged to him, through the advantage of your communication, the very rare delight my sister and myself have enjoyed from this first fruits of his genius. I hope the ill-natured review will not have damped such true Parnassian fire. It ought not, for when life is granted to the possessor it always burns its brilliant way through every obstacle. Had Chatterton possessed sufficient manliness of mind to know the magnanimity of patience, and been aware that great talents have a commission from heaven, he would not have deserted his post, and his name might have paged with Milton.

“Ever much yours,

“JANE PORTER.

“DITTON COTTAGE, Dec. 4, 1818.

“To H. NEVILLE, Esq., Esher.”

Now I feel more obliged than flattered by this — so obliged, that I will not at present give you an extravaganza of a Lady Romance. I will be introduced to them first, if it be merely for the pleasure of writing you about them. Hunt has

asked me to meet Tom Moore, so you shall hear of him also some day.

I am passing a quiet day, which I have not done for a long time; and if I do continue so, I feel I must begin again with my poetry, for if I am not in action, mind or body, I am in pain, and from that I suffer greatly by going into parties, when, from the rules of society and a natural pride, I am obliged to smother my spirits and look like an idiot, because I feel my impulses, if given way to, would too much amaze them. I live under an everlasting restraint, never relieved except when I am composing, so I will write away.

Friday.—I think you knew before you left England that my next subject would be the “Fall of Hyperion.” I went on a little with it last night, but it will take some time to get in the vein again. I will not give you any extracts, because I wish the whole to make an impression. I have, however, a few poems which you will like, and I will copy them out on the next sheet. I will write to Haslam this morning to know when the next packet sails, and till it does I will write something every day. After that my journal shall go on like clock-work, and you must not complain of its dulness; for what I wish is to write a quantity to you, knowing well that dulness itself from me will be instructing to you. You may conceive how this, not having been done, has weighed upon me. I shall be better able to judge from your next what sort of information will be of most service or amusement to you.

Perhaps, as you are fond of giving me sketches of characters, you may like a little pic-nic of scandal

even across the Atlantic. Shall I give you Miss Brawne?¹ She is about my height, with a fine style of countenance of the lengthened sort; she wants sentiment in every feature; she manages to make her hair look well; her nostrils are very fine, though a little painful; her mouth is bad and good; her profile is better than her full face, which indeed is not full, but pale and thin without showing any bone; her shape is very graceful and so are her movements; her arms are good, her hands bad-ish, her feet tolerable. She is not seventeen, but she is ignorant; monstrous in her behaviour, flying out in all directions, calling people such names that I was forced lately to make use of the term — Minx: this is, I think, from no innate vice, but from a penchant she has of acting stylishly. I am however tired of such style, and shall decline any more of it. She had a friend to visit her lately; you have known plenty such. She plays the music, but without one sensation but the feel of the ivory at her fingers; she is a downright Miss, without one set-off. We hated her, and smoked her and baited, and I think drove her away. Miss Brawne thinks her a paragon of fashion, and says she is the only woman in the world she would change persons with. What a stripe — she is as superior as a rose to a dandelion.

¹ This is the first mention of Fanny Brawne's name in any of the letters to his brother and sister. This letter appears to have been written about the same time that

he wrote to his friend Reynolds and said: "I never was in love, yet the voice and shape of a woman has haunted me these two days."

It is some days since I wrote the last page, but I never know; but I must write. I am looking into a book of Dubois—he has written directions to the players. One of them is very good: “In singing, never mind the music—observe what time you please. It would be a pretty degradation indeed if you were obliged to confine your genius to the dull regularity of a fiddle—horse-hair and cat-guts. No, let him keep *your* time and play *your* time; *dodge him.*” I will now copy out the sonnet and letter I have spoken of. The outside was thus directed: “Messrs. Taylor and Hessey are requested to forward the enclosed letter by some *safe* mode of conveyance to the author of ‘Endymion,’ who is not known at Teignmouth; or if they have not his address, they will return the letter by post, directed as below, within a fortnight: Mr. P. Fenbank, P. O., Teignmouth. 9th November, 1818.” In this sheet was enclosed the following, with a superscription: “Mr. John Keats, Teignmouth”; then came “Sonnet to John Keats,” which I could not copy for any in the world but you, who know that I scout “mild light and loveliness,” or any such nonsense, in myself.

Star of high promise! Not to this dark age
Do thy mild light and loveliness belong;
For it is blind, intolerant, and wrong,
Dead to empyreal soarings, and the rage
Of scoffing spirits bitter war doth wage
With all that bold integrity of song.
Yet thy clear beam shall shine through ages strong,
To ripest times a light and heritage,
And those breathe now who dote upon thy fame,
Whom thy wild numbers wrap beyond their being,

Who love the freedom of thy lays, their aim
Above the scope of a dull tribe unseeing,
And there is one whose hand will never scant,
From his poor store of fruits, all thou canst want.
(Turn over.)

I turned over and found a £25 note. Now this appears to me all very proper. If I had refused it, I should have appeared in a very braggadocio, dunderheaded manner; and yet the present galls me a little, and I do not know that I shall not return it, if I ever meet with the donor, after whom to no purpose have I written.

I must not forget to tell you that a few days since I went with Dilke a-shooting on the heath, and shot a tom-tit; there were as many guns abroad as birds.

Thursday.—On my word, I think so little I have not one opinion upon anything except in matters of taste. I never feel certain of any truth, but from a clear perception of its beauty, and I find myself very young-minded, even in that perceptive power, which I hope will increase. A year ago, I could not understand in the slightest degree Raphael's cartoons; now, I begin to read them a little. And how did I learn to do so? By seeing something done in quite an opposite spirit; I mean a picture of Guido's, in which all the Saints, instead of that heroic simplicity and unaffected grandeur which they inherit from Raphael, had, each of them, both in countenance and gesture, all the canting, solemn, melo-dramatic mawkishness of Mackenzie's Father Nicholas. When I was last at Haydon's I looked over a book of prints taken

from the fresco of the church at Milan, the name of which I forget. In it were comprised specimens of the first and second age in art in Italy. I do not think I ever had a greater treat, out of Shakespeare; full of romance and the most tender feeling; magnificent of drapery beyond everything I ever saw, not excepting Raphael's,—but grotesque to a curious pitch; yet still making up a fine whole, even finer to me than more accomplished works, as there was left so much room for imagination. I have not heard one of this last course of Hazlitt's lectures. They were upon wit and humour, the English comic writers, &c.

I do not think I have anything to say in the business way. You will let me know what you wish done with your property in England—what things you would wish sent out. But I am quite in the dark as to your arrival in America. Your first letter will be the key by which I shall open your hearts and see what spaces want filling with any particular information. Whether the affairs of Europe are more or less interesting to you; whether you would like to hear of the theatres, the Bear Garden, the boxers, the painters, the lecturers, the dress, the progress of dandyism, the progress of courtship, or the fate of Mary Millar, being a full, true, and ~~the~~ particular account of Miss Mary's ten suitors; how the first tried the effect of swearing, the second of stammering, the third of whispering, the fourth of sonnets, the fifth of Spanish-leather boots, the sixth of flattering her body, the seventh of flattering her mind, the eighth of flattering himself, the ninth of sticking to her mother, the

tenth of kissing the chambermaid and bidding her tell her mistress,— but he was soon discharged.

And now, for the time, I bid you good-bye.

Your most affectionate brother,

JOHN.

No. 13.

SUNDAY MORN, Feby. 14th, 1819.

MY DEAR BROTHER AND SISTER :

How is it we have not heard from you from the Settlement yet? The letters must surely have miscarried. I am in expectation every day. Peachey wrote me a few days ago, saying some more acquaintances of his were preparing to set out for Birkbeck; therefore, I shall take the opportunity of sending you what I can muster in a sheet or two. I am still at Wentworth Place—indeed, I have kept indoors lately, resolved if possible to rid myself of my sore throat; consequently, I have not been to see your mother since my return from Chichester; but my absence from her has been a great weight upon me. I say since my return from Chichester—I believe I told you I was going thither. I was nearly a fortnight at Mr. John Snooks's, and a few days at old Mr. Dilke's. Nothing worth speaking of happened at either place. I took down some thin paper and wrote on it a little poem call'd "St. Agnes' Eve," which you shall have as it is when I have finished the blank part of the rest for you. I went out twice at Chichester to old dowager card parties.

I see very little now, and very few persons, being almost tired of men and things. Brown and Dilke are very kind and considerate towards me. The Miss R——s have been stopping next door lately, but are very dull. Miss Brawne and I have every now and then a chat and a tiff. Brown and Dilke are walking round their garden, hands in pockets, making observations. The literary world I know nothing about. There is a poem from Rogers dead born; and another satire is expected from Byron, called "Don Giovanni." Yesterday I went to town for the first time for these three weeks. I met people from all parts and of all sets — Mr. Towers, one of the Holts, Mr. Dominic Williams, Mr. Woodhouse, Mrs. Hazlitt and son, Mrs. Webb, and Mrs. Septimus Brown. Mr. Woodhouse was looking up at a book window in Newgate street, and, being shortsighted, twisted his muscles into so queer a stage that I stood by in doubt whether it was him or his brother, if he has one, and turning round, saw Mrs. Hazlitt, with that little Nero, her son. Woodhouse, on his features subsiding, proved to be Woodhouse, and not his brother. I have had a little business with Mr. Abbey from time to time; he has behaved to me with a little Brusquerie. This hurt me a little, especially when I knew him to be the only man in England who dared to say a thing to me I did not approve of without its being resented, or at least noticed; so I wrote him about it, and have made an alteration in my favour. I expect from this to see more of Fanny, who has been quite shut out from me. I see Cobbet has been attacking the

Settlement, but I cannot tell what to believe, and shall be all out at elbows till I hear from you. I am invited to Miss Millar's birthday dance on the 19th. I am nearly sure I shall not be able to go. A dance would injure my throat very much. I see very little of Reynolds. Hunt, I hear, is going on very badly — I mean in money matters. I shall not be surprised to hear of the worst. Haydon, too, in consequence of his eyes, is out at elbows. I live as prudently as it is possible for me to do. I have not seen Haslam lately. I have not seen Richards for this half year, Rice for three months, or Charles Cowden Clarke for God knows when.

When I last called in Henrietta street,^{*} Miss Millar was very unwell, and Miss Waldegrave as staid and self-possessed as usual. Henry was well. There are two new tragedies — one by the apostate Maw, and one by Miss Jane Porter. Next week I am going to stop at Taylor's for a few days, when I will see them both and tell you what they are. Mrs. and Mr. Bentley are well, and all the young carrots. I said nothing of consequence passed at Snooks's — no more than this — that I like the family very much. Mr. and Mrs. Snooks were very kind. We used to have a little religion and politicks together almost every evening, — and sometimes about you. He proposed writing out for me his experience in farming, for me to send to you. If I should have an opportunity of talking to him about it, I will get all

^{*} Mrs. Wylie, George Keats's mother-in-law, lived in Henrietta street.

I can at all events ; but you may say in your answer to this what value you place upon such information. I have not seen Mr. Lewis lately, for I have shrunk from going up the hill. Mr. Lewis went a few mornings ago to town with Mrs. Brawne. They talked about me, and I heard that Mr. L. said a thing that I am not at all contented with. Says he, "O, he is quite the little poet." Now this is abominable. You might as well say Buonaparte is quite the little soldier. You see what it is to be under six foot and not a lord. There is a long fuzz to-day in the "Examiner" about a young man who delighted a young woman with a valentine. I think it must be Ollier's. Brown and I are thinking of passing the summer at Brussels. If we do, we shall go about the first of May. We—*i. e.*, Brown and I—sit opposite one another all day authorizing. (N. B., an "s" instead of a "z" would give a different meaning.) He is at present writing a story of an old woman who lived in a forest, and to whom the devil or one of his aid-de-feus came one night very late and in disguise. The old dame sets before him pudding after pudding,—mess after mess,—which he devours, and moreover casts his eyes up at a side of bacon hanging over his head, and at the same time asks whether her cat is a rabbit. On going, he leaves her three pips of Eve's apple, and somehow she, having lived a virgin all her life, begins to repent of it, and wished herself beautiful enough to make all the world and even the other world fall in love with her. So it happens, she sets out from her smokey cottage in magnificent apparel. The

first city she enters, every one falls in love with her, from the prince to the blacksmith. A young gentleman on his way to the church to be married leaves his unfortunate bride and follows this nonsuch. A whole regiment of soldiers are smitten at once and follow her. A whole convent of monks in Corpus Christi procession join the soldiers. The mayor and corporation follow the same road. Old and young, deaf and dumb,—all but the blind,—are smitten, and form an immense concourse of people, who — what Brown will do with them I know not. The devil himself falls in love with her, flies away with her to a desert place, in consequence of which she lays an infinite number of eggs. The eggs, being hatched from time to time, fill the world with many nuisances, such as John Knox, George Fox, Johanna Southcote, and Gifford.

There have been within a fortnight eight failures of the highest consequence in London. Brown went a few evenings since to Davenport's, and on his coming in he talked about bad news in the city with such a face I began to think of a national bankruptcy. I did not feel much surprised and was rather disappointed. Carlisle, a bookseller on the *Hone* principle, has been issuing pamphlets from his shop in Fleet street called the Deist. He was conveyed to Newgate last Thursday; he intends making his own defense. I was surprised to hear from Taylor the amount of money of the booksellers' last sale. What think you of £25,000? He sold 4000 copies of Lord Byron. I am sitting opposite the Shakspeare I brought from the Isle of Wight — and I never look at it but the silk

tassels* on it give me as much pleasure as the face of the poet itself.

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In my next packet, as this is one by the way, I shall send you "The Pot of Basil," "St. Agnes Eve," and if I should have finished it, a little thing called "The Eve of Saint Mark." You see what fine Mother Radcliff names I have—it is not my fault—I did not search for them. I have not gone on with "Hyperion"—for, to tell the truth, I have not been in great cue for writing lately: I must wait for the spring to rouse me up a little. The only time I went out from Bedhampton was to see a chapel consecrated. Brown, I, and John Snook, the boy, went in a chaise behind a leaden horse. Brown drove, but the horse did not mind him. This chapel is built by a Mr. Way, a great Jew converter, who in that line has spent one hundred thousand pounds. He maintains a great number of poor Jews. *Of course, his communion-plate was stolen.* He spoke to the clerk about it. The clerk said he was very sorry, adding:

"I dare say, your honour, it's among ush."

The chapel is built in Mr. Way's park. The consecration was not amusing. There were numbers of carriages—and his house crammed with clergy. They sanctified the chapel, and it being a wet day, consecrated the burial-ground through the vestry window. I begin to hate parsons; they did not make me love them that day, when I saw them in their proper colours. A parson is a lamb in a drawing-room and a lion in a vestry. The notions

* These tassels were made by Mrs. George Keats.

of society will not permit a parson to give way to his temper in any shape — so he festers in himself — his features get a peculiar, diabolical, self-sufficient, iron stupid expression. He is continually acting. His mind is against every man, and every man's mind is against him. He is an hypocrite to the believer and a coward to the unbeliever. He must be either a knave or an idiot — and there is no man so much to be pitied as an idiot parson. The soldier who is cheated into an *esprit du corps* by a red coat, a band, and colours, for the purpose of nothing, is not half so pitiable as the parson who is led by the nose by the bench of bishops and is smothered in absurdities — a poor, necessary subaltern of the Church.

Friday, 18th February. — The day before yesterday I went to Romney street; your mother was not at home. We lead very quiet lives here; Dilke is at present at Greek history and antiquities, and talks of nothing but the elections of Westminster and the Retreat of the Ten Thousand. I never drink above three glasses of wine, and never any spirits and water; though, by the bye, the other day Woodhouse took me to his coffee-house and ordered a bottle of claret. How I like claret! When I can get claret, I must drink it. 'Tis the only palate affair I am at all sensual in. Would it not be a good spec. to send you some vine roots? Could it be done? I'll inquire. If you could make some wine like claret to drink on summer evenings in an arbour! It fills one's mouth with a gushing freshness, then goes down cool and feverless. Then, you do not feel it quarreling with one's liver. No; 'tis

rather a peace-maker, and lies as quiet as it did in the grape. Then it is as fragrant as the queen bee ; and the more ethereal part mounts into the brain, not assaulting the cerebral parts like a bully looking for his trull, and hurrying from door to door, bouncing against the wainscot, but rather walks like Aladdin about his enchanted palace, so gently that you do not feel his step. Other wines of a heavy and spirituous nature transform a man into a Silenus ; this makes him a Hermes, and gives a woman the soul and immortality of an Ariadne, for whom Bacchus always kept a good cellar of claret, and even of that he never could persuade her to take above two cups. I said this same claret is the only palate-passion I have. I forgot game ; I must plead guilty to the breast of a partridge, the back of a hare, the back-bone of a grouse, the wing and side of a pheasant, and a woodcock *passim*. Talking of game (I wish I could make it), the lady whom I met at Hastings, and of whom I wrote you, I think, has lately sent me many presents of game and enabled me to make as many. She made me take home a pheasant the other day, which I gave to Mrs. Dilke. The next I intend for your mother. I have not said in any letter a word about my own affairs. In a word, I am in no despair about them. My poem has not at all succeeded. In the course of a year or so, I think I shall try the public again. In a selfish point of view, I should suffer my pride and my contempt of public opinion to hold me silent ; but for yours and Fanny's sake I will pluck up spirit and try it again. I have no doubt of success in a course of years, if I persevere ; but I must be

patient; for the reviewers have enervated men's minds and made them indolent; few think for themselves. These reviews are getting more and more powerful, especially the "Quarterly." They are like a superstition which, the more it prostrates the crowd and the longer it continues, the more it becomes powerful, just in proportion to their increasing weakness. I was in hopes that as people saw, as they must do now, all the trickery and iniquity of these plagues, they would scout them; but no; they are like the spectators at the Westminster cockpit, they like the battle, and do not care who wins or who loses.

On Monday, we had to dinner Severn and Cawthorn, the bookseller and print-virtuoso. In the evening, Severn went home to paint, and we other three went to the play to see Sheil's new tragedy cycled "Evadne." In the morning, Severn and I took a turn around the Museum. There is a sphinx there of giant size and most voluptuous Egyptian expression; I had not seen it before. The play was bad, even in comparison with 1818, the "Augustan age of the drama." The whole was made up of a virtuous young woman, an indignant brother, a suspecting lover, a libertine prince, a gratuitous villain, a street in Naples, a cypress grove, lilies and roses, virtue and vice, a bloodysword, a spangled jacket, one "Lady Olivia," one Miss O'Neil *alias* "Evadne" *alias* "Bellamira." The play is a fine amusement, as a friend of mine once said to me. "Do what you will," said he, "a poor gentleman who wants a guinea cannot spend his two shillings better than at the play-house."

The pantomime was excellent ; I had seen it before, and enjoyed it again.

Your mother and I had some talk about Miss —. Says I : “ Will Henry have that Miss —, a lath with a boddice,— she has been fine drawn,— fit for nothing but to be cut up into cribbage-pins; one who is all muslin, all feathers and bone? Once in travelling she was made use of as a linch-pin. I hope he will not have her, though it is no uncommon thing to be *smitten with a staff*; though she might be useful as a walking-stick, his fishing-rod, his tooth-pick, his hat stick (she runs so much in his head). Let him turn farmer, she would cut into hurdles; let him write poetry, she would be his turn-style. Her gown is like a flag on a pole; she would do for him if he turn freemason; I hope she will prove a flag of truce. When she sits languishing, with one foot on a stool and one elbow on the table and her head inclined, she looks like the sign of the Crooked Billet, or the frontispiece to Cinderella, or a tea-paper wood-cut of Mother Shipton at her studies.”

The nothing of the day is a machine called the “velocipede.” It is a wheel carriage to ride cock-horse upon, sitting astride and pushing it along with the toes, a rudder-wheel in hand. They will go seven miles an hour. A handsome gelding will come to eight guineas; however, they will soon be cheaper, unless the army takes to them.

I look back upon the last month and find nothing to write about; indeed, I do not recollect one thing particular in it. It's all alike; we keep on breathing; the only amusement is a little scandal,

of however fine a shape, a laugh at a pun—and then, after all, we wonder how we could enjoy the scandal or laugh at the pun.

I have been at different times turning it in my head whether I should go to Edinburgh and study for a physician. I am afraid I should not take kindly to it; I am sure I should not take fees: and yet I should like to do so; it is not worse than writing poems and hanging them up to be fly-blown on the "Review" shambles. Everybody is in his own mess: here is the parson at Hampstead quarrelling with all the world; he is in the wrong by this same token. When the black cloth was put up in the church for the Queen's mourning, he asked the workmen to hang it the wrong side outwards, that it might be better when taken down, it being his perquisite.

Friday, 19th March.—This morning I have been reading "The False One." Shameful to say, I was in bed at ten—I mean this morning. The Blackwood's reviewers have committed themselves to a scandalous heresy; they have been putting up Hogg, the Ettrick shepherd, against Burns: the senseless villains! The Scotch cannot manage themselves at all; they want imagination; and that is why they are so fond of Hogg, who has so little of it. This morning I am in a sort of temper, indolent, and supremely careless; I long after a stanza or two of Thomson's "Castle of Indolence"; my passions are all asleep from my having slumbered till nearly eleven and weakened the animal fibre all over me to a delightful sensation about three degrees this side of faintness. If I had teeth of pearl and the breath of lilies, I should call it languor;

but as I am I must call it laziness. In this state of effeminacy, the fibres of the brain are relaxed in common with the rest of the body, and to such a happy degree that pleasure has no show of enticement and pain no unbearable frown; neither poetry, nor ambition, nor love have any alertness of countenance: as they pass by me they seem rather like three figures on a Greek vase, two men and a woman, whom no one but myself could distinguish in their disguisement. This is the only happiness, and is a rare instance of advantage in the body overpowering the mind.

I have this moment received a note from Haslam, in which he writes that he expects the death of his father, who has been for some time in a state of insensibility; I shall go to town to-morrow to see him. This is the world; thus we cannot expect to give away many hours to pleasure; circumstances are like clouds, continually gathering and bursting. While we are laughing, the seed of trouble is put into the wide, arable land of events; while we are laughing, it sprouts, it grows, and suddenly bears a poisonous fruit which we must pluck. Even so, we have leisure to reason on the misfortunes of our friends: our own touch us too nearly for words. Very few men have ever arrived at a complete disinterestedness of mind; very few have been interested by a pure desire for the benefit of others: in the greater part of the benefactors of humanity, some meretricious motive has sullied their greatness, some melo-dramatic scenery has fascinated them. From the manner in which I feel Haslam's misfortune, I perceive how far I am from any

humble standard of disinterestedness; yet this feeling ought to be carried to its highest pitch, as there is no fear of its ever injuring society. In wild nature, the hawk would lose his breakfast of robins, and the robin his worms; the lion must starve as well as the swallow. The great part of men sway their way with the same instinctiveness, the same unwandering eye from their purposes, the same animal eagerness as the hawk; the hawk wants a mate, so does the Man. Look at them both; they set about it and procure one in the same manner: they want both a nest, and they set about one in the same manner. The noble animal, man, for his amusement, smokes a pipe; the hawk balances about the clouds: that is the only difference of their leisures. This is that which makes the amusement of life to a speculative mind. I go among the fields, and catch a glimpse of a stoat or a field-mouse peeping out of the withered grass; the creature hath a purpose, and its eyes are bright with it. I go amongst the buildings of a city, and I see a man hurrying along—to what? The creature hath a purpose, and its eyes are bright with it; but then, as Wordsworth says, “We have all one human heart!” There is an electric fire in human nature tending to purify; so that among these human creatures there is continually some birth of new heroism; the pity is that we must wonder after it, as we should at finding a pearl in rubbish. I have no doubt that thousands of people never heard of have had hearts completely disinterested. I can remember but two—Socrates and Jesus. Their histories evince it. What I heard Taylor observe

with respect to Socrates is true of Jesus : that though he transmitted no writing of his own to posterity, we have his mind and his sayings and his greatness handed down to us by others. Even here, though I am pursuing the same instinctive course as the veriest animal you can think of,—I am, however, young and writing at random, straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness, without knowing the bearing of any one assertion, of any one opinion,—yet in this may I not be free from sin ? May there not be superior beings amused with any graceful though instinctive attitude my mind may fall into, as I am entertained with the alertness of the stoat or the anxiety of the deer ? Though a quarrel in the street is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine ; the commonest man shows a grace in his quarrel. By a superior being our reasonings may take the same tone ; though erroneous, they may be fine. This is the very thing in which consists poetry, and if so, it is not so fine a thing as philosophy, for the same reason that an eagle is not so fine a thing as truth. Give me this credit, do you not think I strive to know myself ? Give me this credit, and you will not think that on my own account I repeat the lines of Milton :

“ How charming is divine philosophy,
Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute.”

No, not for myself, feeling grateful, as I do, to have got into a state to relish them properly. Nothing ever comes real till it is experienced ; even

a proverb is no proverb to you till life has illustrated it.

I am afraid that your anxiety for me leads you to fear for the violence of my temperament, continually smothered down; for that reason I did not intend to send you the following sonnet; but look over the two last pages, and ask yourself if I have not that within myself which will bear the buffets of the world. It will be the best comment on my sonnet; it will show you that it was written with no agony but that of ignorance, with no thirst but that of knowledge, when pushed to the point. Though the first steps to it were through my human passions, they went away, and I wrote with my mind and perhaps, I must confess, a little bit of my heart:

Why did I laugh to-night? No voice will tell:
 No God, no Demon of severe response
 Deigns to reply from Heaven or from Hell.
 Then to my human heart I turn at once.
 Heart, thou and I are here alone;
 I say, why did I laugh? O mortal pain!
 O Darkness! Darkness! ever must I moan,
 To question Heaven and Hell and Heart in vain.
 Why did I laugh I know this Being's lease,
 My fancy to its outmost blisses spreads;
 Yet would I on this very midnight cease,
 And the world's gaudy ensigns see in shreds;
 Verse, Fame, and Beauty are intense indeed,
 But Death intenser — Death is Life's high meed.

I went to bed and enjoyed uninterrupted sleep;
 sane I went to bed and sane I arose.

April 15th. — You see what a time it is since I wrote; all that time I have been, day after day, ex-

pecting letters from you. I write quite in the dark. In hopes of a letter to-day I deferred till night that I might write in the light. It looks so much like rain to-day that I shall not go to town but put it off till to-morrow. Brown this morning is writing some Spencerian stanzas against Miss Brawne and me; so I shall amuse myself with him in the manner of Spenser.

"He is to weet a melancholy carle;
Thin in the waist, with bushy head of hair,
As hath the seeded thistle, when a parle
It holds with zephyr, ere it sendeth fair
Its light balloons into the summer air;
Thereto his beard had not begun to bloom,
No brush had touched his chin, or razor sheer;
No care had touched his cheek with mortal doom,
But new he was and bright, as scarf from Persian loom.

"Ne cared he for wine or half and half;
Ne cared he for fish, or flesh, or fowl;
And sauces held he worthless as the chaff;
He's deigned the swine head at the wassail bowl;
Ne with loose ribbalds sat he cheek by jowl;
Ne with sly lemans in the scorner's chair;
But after water-brooks this pilgrim's soul
Panted, and all his food was woodland air;
Though he would oft-times feast on gilliflowers rare.

"The slang of cities in no wise he knew,
Tipping the wink to him was heathen Greek;
He sipped no "olden Tom" or "ruin blue,"
Or Nantz, or cherry brandy, drank full meek
By many a damsel brave, and rouge of cheek;
Nor did he know each aged watchman's beat,
Nor in obscured purlieus would he seek
For curled Jewesses, with ankles neat,
Who, as they walked abroad, made tinkling with their feet."

This character would insure him a situation in the establishment of the patient Griselda. Brown is gone to bed and I am tired of writing; there is a north wind playing green-gooseberry with the trees, it blows so keen. I don't care so it helps, even with side wind, a letter to me.

The fifth canto of Dante pleases me more and more; it is that one in which he meets with Paulo and Francesca. I had passed many days in rather a low state of mind, and in the midst of them I dreamed of being in that region of hell. The dream was one of the most delightful enjoyments I ever had in my life. I floated about the wheeling atmosphere, as it is described, with a beautiful figure, to whose lips mine were joined, it seemed for an age; and in the midst of all this cold and darkness I was warm. Ever-flowery tree-tops sprung up and we rested on them, sometimes with the lightness of a cloud, till the wind blew us away again. I tried a sonnet on it: there are fourteen lines in it, but nothing of what I felt. Oh! that I could dream it every night.

As Hermes once took to his feathers light,
When lulled Argus, baffled swoon'd and slept,
So on a Delpic reed, my idle spright,
So play'd, so charm'd, so conquer'd, so bereft
The dragon-world of all its hundred eyes,
And seeing it asleep so fled away,
Not to pure Ida with its snow cold skies,
Nor unto Tempe, where Jove grieved a day;
But to that second circle of sad Hell,
Where in the gust, the whirlwind, and the flaw
Of rain and hail-stones, lovers need not tell
Their sorrows,—pale were the sweet lips I saw,
Pale were the lips I kiss'd, and fair the form
I floated with, about that melancholy storm.

I want very much a little of your wit, my dear sister,—a letter of yours, just to bandy back a pun or two across the Atlantic, and send a quibble over the Floridas. Now by this time you have crumpled up your large bonnet—what do you wear?—a cap! Do you put your hair in paper of nights? Do you pay the Misses Birkbeck a morning visit? Have you any tea, or do you milk and water with them? What place of worship do you go to—the Quakers, the Moravians, the Unitarians, or the Methodists? Are there any flowers in bloom you like? Any beautiful heaths? Any streets full of corset makers? What sort of shoes have you to put those pretty feet of yours in? Do you desire compliments to one another? Do you ride on horseback? What do you have for breakfast, dinner, and supper, without mentioning lunch and bite, and wet and snack, and a bit to stay one's stomach? Do you get any spirits? Now you might easily distil some whiskey, and going into the woods set up a whiskey shop for the monkeys! Do you and the other ladies get groggy on anything? A little so-so-ish, so as to be seen home with a lanthorn? You may perhaps have a game at puss-in-the-corner: ladies are warranted to play at this game, though they have not whiskers. Have you a fiddle in the Settlement, or at any rate a Jew's-harp which will play in spite of one's teeth? When you have nothing else to do for a whole day, I'll tell you how you may employ it: first get up, and when you are dressed, as it would be pretty early, with a high wind in the woods, give George a cold pig with my compliments; then you may saunter into the nearest coffee-house, and

after taking a dram, and a look at the "Chronicle," go and frighten the wild boars on the strength of it. You may as well bring one home for breakfast, serving up the hoofs garnished with bristles, and a grunt or two to accompany the singing of the kettle. Then, if George is not up, give him a colder pig, always with my compliments. After you have eaten your breakfast, keep your eye upon dinner; it is the safest way. You should keep a hawk's eye over your dinner, and keep hovering over it till due time; then pounce upon it, taking care not to break any plates. While you are hovering with your dinner in prospect, you may do a thousand things — put a hedgehog in George's hat, pour a little water into his rifle, soak his boots into a pail of water, cut his jacket round into shreds, like a Roman kilt or the back of my grandmother's stays, tear off his buttons —

The following poem, the last I have written, is the first and only one with which I have taken even moderate pains. I have for the most part dashed off my lines in a hurry; this one I have done leisurely; I think it reads the more richly for it, and it will, I hope, encourage me to write other things in even a more peaceable and healthy spirit. You must recollect that Psyche was not embodied as a goddess before the time of Apuleius the Platonist, who lived after the Augustan age, and consequently the goddess was never worshipped or sacrificed to with any of the ancient fervour, and perhaps never thought of, in the old religion: I am more orthodox than to let a heathen goddess be so neglected.

(Here follows the "Ode to Psyche," which is well known and appreciated by every well-informed reader of English poetry.)

See vol. III. p. 2

I have been endeavouring to discover a better sonnet stanza than we have. The legitimate does not suit the language well, from the pouncing rhymes; the other appears too elegiac, and the couplet at the end of it has seldom a pleasing effect. I do not pretend to have succeeded. It will explain itself.

If by dull rhymes our English must be chain'd,

And like Andromeda, the sonnet sweet

Fetter'd in spite of pained loveliness;

Let us find out, if we must be constrain'd,

Sandals more interwoven and complete

To fit the naked foot of poesy;

Let us inspect the lyre, and weigh the stress

Of every chord, and see what may be gain'd

By ear industrious and attention meet:

Misers of sound and syllable, no less

Than Midas of his coinage, let us be

Jealous of dead leaves in the bay wreath crown;

So that if we may not let the muse be free,

She will be bound with garlands of her own.

This is the third of May, and everything is in delightful forwardness; the violets are not withered before the peeping of the first rose. You must let me know everything — how parcels go and come, what papers you have, and what newspapers you want, and other things. God bless you, my dear brother and sister.

Your ever affectionate brother,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 14.

WINCHESTER, Sept., Friday, 1819.

MY DEAR GEORGE :

I was closely employed in reading and composition in this place, whither I had come from Shanklin, for the convenience of a library, when I received your last, dated July 24th. You will have seen by the short letter I wrote from Shanklin how matters stand between us and Mr. Jennings. They had not at all moved, and I knew no way of overcoming the inveterate obstinacy of our affairs. On receiving your last, I immediately took a place in the same night's coach for London. Mr. Abbey behaved extremely well to me, appointed Monday evening at seven to meet me, and observed that he should drink tea at that hour. I gave him the inclosed note, and showed him the last leaf of yours to me. He really appeared anxious about it, and promised he would forward your money as quickly as possible. I think I mentioned that Walton was dead. He will apply to Mr. Gliddon, the partner, endeavour to get rid of Mr. Jennings's claim, and be expeditious. He has received an answer from my letter to Fry. That is something. We are certainly in a very low estate. I say we, for I am in such a situation, that were it not for the assistance of Brown and Taylor, I must be as badly off as a man can be. I could not raise any sum by the promise of any poem, no, not by the mortgage of my intellect. We must wait a little while. I really have hopes of success. I have finished a

tragedy,¹ which, if it succeeds, will enable me to sell what I may have in manuscript to a good advantage. I have passed my time in reading, writing, and fretting — the last I intend to give up, and stick to the other two. They are the only chances of benefit to us. Your wants will be a fresh spur to me. I assure you you shall more than share what I can get whilst I am still young. The time may come when age will make me more selfish. I have not been well treated by the world, and yet I have, capitally well. I do not know a person to whom so many purse-strings would fly open as to me, if I could possibly take advantage of them, which I cannot do, for none of the owners of these purses are rich. Your present situation I will not suffer myself to dwell upon. When misfortunes are so real, we are glad enough to escape them, and the thought of them. I cannot help thinking Mr. Audubon a dishonest man.* Why did he make you believe that he was a man of property? How is it his circumstances have altered so suddenly? In truth, I do not believe you fit to deal with the world, or at least the American world. But, good God! who can avoid these chances? You have done your best. Take matters as coolly as you can, and confidently expecting help from England, act as if no help was nigh. Mine, I am

¹ "Otho the Great," which was accepted by Elliston at Drury Lane, and Kean was to have played the part of Ludolph, with which he seems to have been well pleased. It was not, however, produced.

* Audubon, the naturalist, sold to George Keats a boat loaded with merchandise, which at the time of the sale Audubon knew to be at the bottom of the Mississippi River.

sure, is a tolerable tragedy; it would have been a bank to me if, just as I had finished it, I had not heard of Kean's resolution to go to America. That was the worst news I could have had. There is no actor can do the principal character besides Kean. At Covent Garden, there is a great chance of its being damn'd. Were it to succeed even there it would lift me out of the mire; I mean the mire of a bad reputation, which is continually rising against me. My name with the literary fashionables is vulgar. I am a weaver-boy to them. A tragedy would lift me out of this mess, and mess it is as far as it regards our pockets. But be not cast down any more than I am; I feel that I can bear real ills better than imaginary ones. Whenever I find myself growing vapourish, I rouse myself, wash, and put on a clean shirt, brush my hair and clothes, tie my shoestrings neatly, and in fact adonize as I were going out. Then, all clean and comfortable, I sit down to write. This I find the greatest relief. Besides, I am becoming accustomed to the privations of the pleasures of sense. In the midst of the world, I live like a hermit. I have forgot how to lay plans for enjoyment of any pleasure. I feel I can bear anything,—any misery, even imprisonment,—so long as I have neither wife nor child. Perhaps you will say yours are your only comfort; they must be. I returned to Winchester the day before yesterday, and am now here alone, for Brown, some days before I left, went to Bedhampton, and there he will be for the next fortnight. The term of his house will be up in the middle of next month, when we shall return to

Hampstead. On Sunday, I dined with your mother and Hen and Charles in Henrietta street. Mrs. and Miss Millar were in the country. Charles had been but a few days returned from Paris. I dare say you will have letters expressing the motives of his journey. Mrs. Wylie and Miss Waldegrave seem as quiet as two mice there alone. I did not show your last. I thought it better not, for better times will certainly come, and why should they be unhappy in the meantime? On Monday morning, I went to Wallhamston. Fanny looked better than I had seen her for some time. She complains of not hearing from you, appealing to me as if it was half my fault. I had been so long in retirement that London appeared a very odd place. I could not make out I had so many acquaintances, and it was a whole day before I could feel among men. I had another strange sensation. There was not one house I felt any pleasure to call at. Reynolds was in the country, and, saving himself, I am prejudiced against all that family. Dilke and his wife and child were in the country. Taylor was at Nottingham. I was out, and everybody was out. I walked about the streets as in a strange land. Rice was the only one at home. I passed some time with him. I know him better since we have liv'd a month together in the Isle of Wight. He is the most sensible and even wise man I know. He has a few John Bull prejudices, but they improve him. His illness is at times alarming. We are great friends, and there is no one I like to pass a day with better. Martin called in to bid him good-bye before he set out for Dublin. If you would

like to hear one of his jokes, here is one which, at the time, we laughed at a good deal: A Miss —, with three young ladies, one of them Martin's sister, had come a-gadding in the Isle of Wight, and took for a few days a cottage opposite ours. We dined with them one day, and as I was saying, they had fish. Miss — said she thought *they tasted of the boat*. "No," says Martin, very seriously, "they haven't been kept long enough." I saw Haslam. He is very much occupied with love and business, being one of Mr. Saunders's executors and lover to a young woman. He showed me her picture by Severn. I think she is, though not very cunning, too cunning for him. Nothing strikes me so forcibly with a sense of the ridiculous as love. A man in love, I do think, cuts the sorriest figure in the world; queer, when I know a poor fool to be really in pain about it. I could burst out laughing in his face. His pathetic visage becomes irresistible. Not that I take Haslam as a pattern for lovers; he is a very worthy man and a good friend. His love is very amusing. Somewhere in the "Spectator" is related an account of a man inviting a party of stutterers and squinters to his table. It would please me more to scrape together a party of lovers—not to dinner, but to tea. There would be no fighting as among knights of old.

Pensive they sit, and roll their languid eyes,
Nibble their toast, and cool their tea with sighs;
Or else forget the purpose of the night,
Forget their tea,—forget their appetite.
See, with cross'd arms they sit—Ah! hapless crew,
The fire is going out, and no one rings

For coals, and therefore no coals Betty brings.
A fly is in the milk-pot. Must he die
Circled by a humane society?
No, no; there, Mr. Werter takes his spoon,
Inserts it, dips the handle, and lo! soon
The little straggler, sav'd from perils dark,
Across the teaboard draws a long, wet mark.
Romeo! Arise! take snuffers by the handle,
There's a large cauliflower in each candle.
A winding sheet—ah, me! I must away
To No. 7, just beyond the circus gay.
Alas, my friend, your coat sits very well;
Where may your Taylor live? I may not tell.
O, pardon me. I'm absent now and then.
Where *might* my Taylor live? I say again.
I cannot tell. Let me no more be teased;
He lives in Wapping, might live where he pleased.

You see, I cannot get on without writing, as boys do at school, a few nonsense verses. I begin them, and before I have written six the whim has passed—if there is anything deserving so respectable a name in them. I shall put in a bit of information anywhere, just as it strikes me. Mr. Abbey is to write to me as soon as he can bring matters to bear, and then I am to go to town and tell him the means of forwarding to you through Capper and Hazlewood. I wonder I did not put this before. I shall go on to-morrow; it is so fine now I must take a bit of a walk.

SATURDAY.

With my inconstant disposition it is no wonder that this morning, amid all our bad times and misfortunes, I should feel so alert and well-spirited. At this moment you are perhaps in a very different state of mind. It is because my hopes are ever

paramount to my despair. I have been reading over a part of a short poem I have composed lately, called "*Lamia*," and I am certain there is that sort of fire in it that must take hold of people some way. Give them either pleasant or unpleasant sensation — what they want is a sensation of some sort. I wish I could pitch the key of your spirits as high as mine is; but your organ loft is beyond the reach of my voice.

I admire the exact admeasurement of my niece in your mother's letter. O! the little span-long elf. I am not in the least a judge of the proper weight and size of an infant. Never trouble yourselves about that. She is sure to be a fine woman. Let her have only delicate nails, both on hands and feet, and both as small as a May fly's, who will live you his life on a 3 square inch of oak-leaf; and nails she must have, quite different from the market women here, who plough into the butter and make a quarter-pound taste of it. I intend to write a letter to your wife, and there I may say more on this little plump subject. I hope she's plump. Still harping on my daughter. This Winchester is a place tolerably well suited to me. There is a fine cathedral, a college, a Roman Catholic chapel, a Methodist do., an Independant do.; and there is not one loom, or anything like manufacturing beyond bread and butter, in the whole city. There are a number of rich Catholics in the place. It is a respectable, ancient, aristocratic place, and moreover it contains a nunnery. Our set are by no means so hail fellow well met on literary subjects as we were wont to be. Reynolds has turn'd

to the law. By the bye, he brought out a little piece at the Lyceum call'd "*One, Two, Three, Four,*" by advertisement. It met with complete success. The meaning of this odd title is explained when I tell you the principal actor is a mimic, who takes off four of our best performers in the course of the farce. Our stage is loaded with mimics. I did not see the piece, being out of town the whole time it was in progress. Dilke is entirely swallowed up in his boy. It is really lamentable to what a pitch he carries a sort of parental mania. I had a letter from him at Shanklin. He went on, a word or two, about the Isle of Wight, which is a bit of hobby horse of his, but he soon deviated to his boy. "I am sitting," says he, "at the window, expecting my boy from school." I suppose I told you somewhere that he lives in Winchester, and his boy goes to the school there, where he gets beaten, and every bruise he has, and I dare say deserves, is very bitter to Dilke. The place I am speaking of puts me in mind of a circumstance which occurred lately at Dilke's. I think it very rich and dramatic, and quite illustrative of the little quiet fun that he will enjoy sometimes. First, I must tell you their house is at the corner of Great Smith street, so that some of the windows look into one street, and the back windows into another round the corner. Dilke had some old people to dinner. I know not who, but there were two old ladies among them. Brown was there — they had known him from a child. Brown is very pleasant with old women, and on that day it seems behaved himself so winningly that they became hand and glove together, and a little

complimentary. Brown was obliged to depart early. He bid them good-bye and passed into the passage. No sooner was his back turned than the old women began lauding him. When Brown had reached the street door, and was just going, Dilke threw up the window and call'd: "Brown! Brown! They say you look younger than ever you did!" Brown went on, and had just turned the corner into the other street when Dilke appeared at the back window, crying: "Brown! Brown! By God, they say you're handsome!" You see what a many words it requires to give any identity to a thing I could have told you in half a minute.

I have been reading lately Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy," and I think you will be very much amused with a page I here copy for you. I call it a Feu de Joie round the batteries of Fort St. Hyphen-de-Phrase on the birth-day of the Digamma. The whole alphabet was drawn up in a phalanx on the corner of an old dictionary, band playing "Amo, amas, &c."

(Here follows a page taken from Part III. Sec. 2, on the Symptoms of Love,—"Every lover admires his mistress," etc., etc.)

There's a dose for you. Fire!! I would give my favourite leg to have written this as a speech in a play. With what effect could Matthews popgun it at the pit! This, I think, will amuse you more than so much poetry. Of that I do not like to copy any, as I am afraid it is too *mal à propos* for you at present; and yet I will send you some, for by the time

you receive it, things in England may have taken a different turn. When I left Mr. Abbey^{*} on Monday evening, I walked up Cheapside, but returned to put some letters in the post, and met him again in Bucklesbury. We walked together through the Poultry as far as the baker's shop he has some concern in. He spoke of it in such a way to me, I thought he wanted me to make an offer to assist him in it. I do believe if I could be a hatter I might be one. He seems anxious about me. He began blowing up Lord Byron while I was sitting with him: "However, may be the fellow says true things now and then," at which he took up a magazine, and read me some extracts from "Don Juan" (Lord Byron's last flash poem), and particularly one against literary ambition. I do think I must be well spoken of among sets, for Hodgkinson is more than polite, and the coffee German endeavoured to be very close to me the other night at Covent Garden, where I went at half price before I tumbled into bed. Every one, however distant an acquaintance, behaves in the most conciliating manner to me. You will see I speak of this as a matter of interest. On the next sheet I will give you a little politicks.

In every age there has been in England, for some two or three centuries, subjects of great popular interest on the carpet, so that however great the uproar, one can scarcely prophesy any material change in the Government, for as loud disturbances have

^{*} Mr. Abbey was the executor of the estate of Keats's father.

agitated this country many times. All civilized countries become gradually more enlightened, and there should be a continual change for the better. Look at this country at present, and remember it when it was even thought impious to doubt the justice of a trial by combat. From that time there has been a gradual change. Three great changes have been in progress : first for the better, next for the worse, and a third time for the better once more. The first was the gradual annihilation of the tyranny of the nobles, when kings found it their interest to conciliate the common people, elevate them, and be just to them. Just when baronial power ceased, and before standing armies were so dangerous, taxes were few, kings were lifted by the people over the heads of their nobles, and those people held a rod over kings. The change for the worse in Europe was again this: the obligation of kings to the multitude began to be forgotten. Custom had made noble-men the humble servants of kings. Then kings turned to the nobles as the adorners of their power, the slaves of it, and from the people as creatures continually endeavouring to check them. Then in every kingdom there was a long struggle of kings to destroy all popular privileges. The English were the only people in Europe who made a grand kick at this. They were slaves to Henry VIII., but were freemen under William III. at the time the French were abject slaves under Louis XIV. The example of England, and the liberal writers of France and England, sowed the seed of opposition to this tyranny, and it was swelling in the ground

till it burst out in the French Revolution. That has had an unlucky termination. It put a stop to the rapid progress of free sentiments in England, and gave our Court hopes of turning back to the despotism of the eighteenth century. They have made a handle of this event in every way to undermine our freedom. They spread a horrid superstition against all innovation and improvement. The present struggle in England of the people is to destroy this superstition. What has rous'd them to do it is their distresses. Perhaps, on this account, the present distresses of this nation are a fortunate thing. Tho' so horrid in their experience, you will see I mean that the French Revolution put a temporary stop to this third change—the change for the better. Now it is in progress again, and I think it an effectual one. This is no contest between Whig and Tory, but between right and wrong. There is scarcely a grain of party spirit now in England. Right and wrong, considered by each man abstractedly, is the fashion. I know very little of these things. I am convinced, however, that apparently small causes make great alterations. There are little signs whereby we may know how matters are going on. This makes the business of Carlisle the bookseller of great moment in my mind. He has been selling deistical pamphlets, republished Tom Payne (sic), and many other works held in superstitious horror. He even has been selling, for some time, immense numbers of a work called "The Deist," which comes out in weekly numbers. For this conduct he, I think, has had above a dozen indictments issued against him, for which he has found

bail to the amount of many thousand pounds. After all, they are afraid to prosecute. They are afraid of his defense; it would be published in all the papers all over the empire. They shudder at this. The trials would light a flame they could not extinguish. Do you not think this of great import? You will hear by the papers of the proceedings at Manchester, and Hunt's triumphal entry into London. It would take me a whole day and a quire of paper to give you anything like detail. I will merely mention that it is calculated that 30,000 people were in the streets waiting for him. The whole distance from the Angel at Islington to the Crown and Anchor was lined with multitudes.

As I pass'd Colnaghi's window I saw a profile portrait of Sands, the destroyer of Kotzebue. His very look must interest every one in his favour. I suppose they have represented him in his college dress. He seems to me like a young Abelard—a fine mouth, cheek bones (and this is no joke) full of sentiment, a fine, unvulgar nose, and plump temples.

On looking over some letters, I found the one I wrote, intended for you, from the foot of Helvellyn to Liverpool; but you had sailed, and therefore it was returned to me. It contained, among other nonsense, an acrostic of my sister's name—and a pretty long name it is. I wrote it in a great hurry, which you will see. Indeed, I would not copy it if I thought it would ever be seen by any but yourselves.

Give me your patience, sister, while I frame
Exact in capitals your golden name,
Or sue the fair Apollo, and he will
Rouse from his heavy slumber and instill
Great love in me for thee and Poesy.
Imagine not that greatest mastery
And kingdom over all the realms of verse
Nears more to Heaven in aught than when we nurse
And surety give to love and brotherhood.

Anthropopagi in Othello's mood;
Ulysses stormed, and his enchanted belt
Glowed with the Muse: but they are never felt
Unbosom'd so, and so eternal made,
Such tender insence in their laurel shade
To all the recent sisters of the Nine,
As this poor offering to you, sister mine.

Kind sister! aye, this third name says you are;
Enchanted has it been the Lord knows where,
And may its taste to you, like good old wine,
Take you to real happiness, and give
Sons, daughters, and a home like honied hive.

FOOT OF HELVELLYN, June 27.

I sent you in my first packet some of my Scotch letters. I find I have one kept back, which was written in the most interesting part of our tour, and will copy part of it in the hope you will not find it unamusing. I would give now anything for Richardson's power of making mountains of mole-hills. *Incipit epistola caledoniensa.*

Dunancullen—I did not know the day of the month, for I find I have not added it. Brown must have been asleep. Just after my last had gone

to the post (before I go any further, I must premise that I would send the identical letter, instead of taking the trouble to copy it; I do not do so, for it would spoil my notion of the neat manner in which I intend to fold these three genteel sheets. The original is written on coarse paper, and the soft ones would ride in the post-bag very uneasy. Perhaps there might be a quarrel).

(Here follows the same letter, written to his brother Tom, and dated "Dunancullen, July 23d, 1818.")

I ought to make a large (?) here, but I had better take the opportunity of telling you I have got rid of my haunting sore throat, and conduct myself in a manner not to catch another.

You speak of Lord Byron and me. There is this great difference between us: he describes what he sees—I describe what I imagine. Mine is the hardest task; now see the immense difference. The "Edinburgh Reviewers" are afraid to touch upon my poem. They do not know what to make of it; they do not like to condemn it, and they will not praise it for fear. They are as shy of it as I should be of wearing a Quaker's hat. The fact is, they have no real taste. They dare not compromise their judgments on so puzzling a question. If on my next publication they should praise me, and so lug in "Endymion," I will address them in a manner they will not at all relish. The cowardliness of the "Edinburgh" is more than the abuse of the "Quarterly."

See No. 9,
p. 27.

Monday.

This day is a grand day for Winchester. They elect the mayor. It was indeed high time the place should have some sort of excitement. There was nothing going on—all asleep. Not an old maid's sedan returning from a card party; and if any old women have got tipsy at christenings, they have not exposed themselves in the street. The first night, tho', of our arrival here there was a slight uproar took place at about ten of the clock. We heard distinctly a noise patting down the street, as of a walking-cane of the good old dowager breed; and a little minute after we heard a less voice observe, "What a noise the ferril made—it must be loose." Brown wanted to call the constables, but I observed it was only a little breeze, and would soon pass over. The side streets here are excessively maiden-lady like. The door-steps always fresh from the flannel. The knockers have a very staid, serious, nay, almost awful, quietness about them. I never saw so quiet a collection of irons and rams'-heads. The doors, most part black, with a little brass handle just above the key-hole, so that you may easily shut yourself out of your own house. He! he! There is none of your Lady Bellaston ringing and rapping here; no thundering, Jupiter-footmen, no opera-treble tattooes, but a modest lifting up of the knocker by a set of little wee old fingers that peep through the grey mittens, and a dying fall thereof. The great beauty of poetry is that it makes everything in every place interesting. The palatine Venice and the abbottine Winchester are equally interesting. Some time

*cf. Letter
to Reynolds,
p. 243.*

since I began a poem called "The Eve of St. Mark," quite in the spirit of town quietude. I think it will give you the sensation of walking about an old country town in a coolish evening. I know not whether I shall ever finish it; I will give it as far as I have gone. *Ut tibi placent.*

See vol. III. p. 15

(Here follows the poem.)

I hope you will like this, for all its carelessness. I must take an opportunity here to observe that though I am writing *to* you, I am all the while writing *at* your wife. This explanation will account for my speaking sometimes *hoity-toity-iohly*, whereas if you were alone, I should sport a little more sober sadness. I am like a squinty gentleman, who, saying soft things to one lady ogles another, or, what is as bad, in arguing with a person on his left hand, appeals with his eyes to one on the right. His vision is elastic; he bends it to a certain object, but having a patent spring it flies off. Writing has this disadvantage of speaking—one cannot write a wink, or a nod, or a grin, or a purse of the lips, or a *smile*—*O law!* One cannot put one's finger to one's nose, or yerk ye in the ribs, or lay hold of your button, in writing; but in all the most lively and titterly parts of my letter you must not fail to imagine me, as the epic poets say, now here, now there; now with one foot pointed at the ceiling, now with another; now with my pen on my ear, now with my elbow in my mouth. O, my friends, you lose the action, and attitude is everything, as Fusili said when he took up his leg like a musket

to shoot a swallow just darting behind his shoulder. And yet, does not the word "mum" go for one's finger beside the nose?—I hope it does. I have to make use of the word "mum," before I tell you that Severn has got a little baby—all his own, let us hope. He told Brown he had given up painting, and had turned modeller. I hope sincerely 'tis not a party concern—that no Mr. ——— or * * * is the real *Pinxit* and Severn the poor *Sculpsit* to this work of art. You know he has long studied in the Life Academy. Haydon—yes, your wife will say, "Here is a sum total account of Haydon again. I wonder your brother don't put a monthly bulliteen in the Philadelphia papers about him. I won't hear—no. Skip down to the bottom, and there are some more of his verses—skip (lullaby-by) them, too." "No, let's go regularly through." "I won't hear a word about Haydon—bless the child, how rioty she is—there, go on there."

Now, pray go on here, for I have a few words to say about Haydon. Before this chancery threat had cut off every legitimate supply of cash from me, I had a little at my disposal. Haydon being very much in want, I lent him £30 of it. Now, in this se-saw game of life, I got nearest to the ground, and this chancery business rivetted me there, so that I was sitting in that uneasy position where the seat slants so abominably. I applied to him for payment. He could not. That was no wonder; but, Goodman Delver, where was the wonder then? Why, marry, in this: he did not seem to care much about it, and let me go without my money; with almost nonchalance, when he

ought to have sold his drawings to supply me. I shall perhaps still be acquainted with him; but for friendship, that is at an end. Brown has been my friend in this. He got him to sign a bond, payable at three months. Haslam has assisted me with the return of part of the money you lent him. Hunt—there, says your wife, there's another of those dull folk! Not a syllable about my friends? Well, Hunt. What about Hunt, pray? You little thing, see how she bites my finger! My! is not this a tooth? Well, when you have done with the tooth, read on. Not a syllable about your friends! Here are some syllables. As far as I could smoke things on the Sunday before last, thus matters stood in Henrietta street: Henry was a greater blade than ever I remember to have seen him. He had on a very nice coat, a becoming waistcoat, and buff trowsers. I think his face has lost a little of the Spanish-brown, but no flesh. He carved some beef exactly to suit my appetite, as if I had been measured for it. As I stood looking out of the window, with Charles, after dinner, quizzing the passengers,—at which, I am sorry to say, he is too apt,—I observed that his young son of a gun's whiskers had begun to curl and curl, little twists and twists, all down the sides of his face, getting properly thickest on the angles of the visage. He certainly will have a notable pair of whiskers. "How shiny your gown is in front," says Charles. "Why, don't you see? 'tis an apron," says Henry; whereat I scrutinized, and, behold, your mother had a purple stuff gown on, and over it an apron of the same colour, being the same cloth that was used for the lining.

And furthermore, to account for the shining, it was the first day of wearing. I guessed as much of the gown—but that is *entre-nous*. Charles likes England better than France. They've got a fat, smiling, fair cook as ever you saw; she is a little lame, but that improves her; it makes her go more swimmingly. When I asked "Is Mrs. Wylie within?" she gave such a large five-and-thirty-year-old smile, it made me look round upon the fourth stair—it might have been the fifth; but that's a puzzle. I shall never be able, if I were to set myself a recollecting for a year, to recollect. I think I remember two or three specks in her teeth, but I really can't say exactly. Your mother said something about Miss Kearle—what that was is quite a riddle to me now, whether she had got fatter or thinner, or broader or longer, straiter, or had taken to the zigzags—whether she had taken to or left off asses' milk. That, by the by, she ought never to touch. How much better it would be to put her out to nurse with the wise woman of Brentford. I can say no more on so spare a subject. Miss Millar, now, is a different morsel, if one knew how to divide and subdivide, theme her out into sections and subsections, lay a little on every part of her body as it is divided, in common with all her fellow-creatures, in Moor's Almanack. But, alas, I have not heard a word about her, no cue to begin upon: there was indeed a buzz about her and her mother's being at old Mrs. So and So's, *who was like to die*, as the Jews say. But I dare say, keeping up their dialect, *she was not like to die*. I must tell you a good thing Reynolds *did*. 'T was the best thing he ever *said*. You

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know, at taking leave of a party at a door-way, sometimes a man dallies and foolishes and gets awkward, and does not know how to make off to advantage. Good-bye—well, good-bye—and yet he does not go; good-bye, and so on,—well, good bless you—you know what I mean. Now, Reynolds was in this predicament, and got out of it in a very witty way. He was leaving us at Hampstead. He delayed, and we were pressing at him, and even said “be off,” at which he put the tails of his coat between his legs and sneak’d off as nigh like a spaniel as could be. He went with flying colours. This is very clever. I must, being upon the subject, tell you another good thing of him. He began, for the service it might be of to him in the law, to learn French; he had lessons at the cheap rate of 2.6 per fag, and observed to Brown, “Gad,” says he, “the man sells his lessons so cheap he must have stolen ‘em.” You have heard of Hook, the farce writer. Horace Smith said to one who asked him if he knew Hook, “O, yes, Hook and I are very intimate.” There’s a page of wit for you, to put John Bunyan’s emblems out of countenance.

TUESDAY.

You see, I keep adding a sheet daily till I send the packet off, which I shall not do for a few days, as I am inclined to write a good deal; for there can be nothing so remembrancing and enchainning as a good long letter, be it composed of what it may. From the time you left me our friends say I have altered completely — am not the same person. Perhaps in this letter I am, for in a letter one takes up

one's existence from the time we last met. I dare say you have altered also — every man does — our bodies every seven years are completely fresh material'd. Seven years ago it was not this hand that clinch'd itself against Hammond.* We are like the relict garments of a saint — the same and not the same, for the careful monks patch it and patch it till there's not a thread of the original garment left, and still they show it for St. Anthony's shirt. This is the reason why men who have been bosom friends, on being separated for any number of years, afterwards meet coldly, neither of them knowing why. The fact is, they are both altered.

Men who live together have a silent moulding and influencing power over each other. They interassimilate. 'Tis an uneasy thought, that in seven years the same hands cannot greet each other again. All this may be obviated by a wilful and dramatic exercise of our minds towards each other. Some think I have lost that poetic ardour and fire 'tis said I once had — the fact is, perhaps I have; but, instead of that, I hope I shall substitute a more thoughtful and quiet power. I am more frequently, now, contented to read and think, but now and then haunted with ambitious thoughts. Quieter in my pulse, improved in my digestion, exciting myself against vexing speculations, scarcely content to write the best verses for the fever they leave behind. I want to compose without this fever. I hope I one day shall. You would scarcely imagine I could live alone so comfortably.

* Hammond was the surgeon to whom Keats was apprenticed.

"Kepen in solitarinesse." I told Anne, the servant here, the other day, to say I was not at home if any one should call. I am not certain how I should endure loneliness and bad weather together. Now, the time is beautiful. I take a walk every day for an hour before dinner, and this is generally my walk: I go out the back gate, across one street into the cathedral yard, which is always interesting; there I pass under the trees along a paved path, pass the beautiful front of the cathedral, turn to the left under a stone door-way,—then I am on the other side of the building,—which leaving behind me, I pass on through two college-like squares, seemingly built for the dwelling-place of deans and prebendaries, garnished with grass and shaded with trees; then I pass through one of the old city gates, and then you are in one college street, through which I pass, and at the end thereof crossing some meadows, and at last a country alley of gardens. I arrive, that is, my worship arrives, at the foundation of Saint Cross, which is a very interesting old place, both for its gothic tower and alms-square and for the appropriation of its rich rents to a relation of the Bishop of Winchester. Then I pass across St. Cross meadows till you come to the most beautifully clear river—now this is only one mile of my walk. I will spare you the other two till after supper, when they would do you more good. You must avoid going the first mile best after dinner.

I could almost advise you to put by all this nonsense until you are lifted out of your difficulties; but when you come to this part, feel with confidence

what I now feel, that though there can be no stop put to troubles we are inheritors of, there can be, and must be, an end to immediate difficulties. Rest in the confidence that I will not omit any exertion to benefit you by some means or other. If I cannot remit you hundreds, I will tens, and if not that, ones. Let the next year be managed by you as well as possible—the next month, I mean, for I trust you will soon receive Abbey's remittance. What he can send you will not be a sufficient capital to ensure you any command in America. What he has of mine I have nearly anticipated by debts, so I would advise you not to sink it, but to live upon it, in hopes of my being able to increase it. To this end I will devote whatever I may gain for a few years to come, at which period I must begin to think of a security of my own comforts, when quiet will become more pleasant to me than the world. Still, I would have you doubt my success. 'Tis at present the cast of a die with me. You say, "These things will be a great torment to me." I shall not suffer them to be so. I shall only exert myself the more, while the seriousness of their nature will prevent me from nursing up imaginary griefs. I have not had the blue devil once since I received your last. I am advised not to publish till it is seen whether the tragedy will or not succeed. Should it, a few months may see me in the way of acquiring property. Should it not, it will be a drawback, and I shall have to perform a longer literary pilgrimage. You will perceive that it is quite out of my interest to come to America. What could I do there? How could I employ

myself, out of the reach of libraries? You do not mention the name of the gentleman who assists you.* 'Tis an extraordinary thing. How could you do without that assistance? I will not trust myself with brooding over this. The following is an extract from a letter of Reynolds to me:

"I am glad to hear you are getting on so well with your writings. I hope you are not neglecting the revision of your poems for the press, from which I expect more than you do."

The first thought that struck me on reading your last was to mortgage a poem to Murray, but on more consideration, I made up my mind not to do so; my reputation is very low; he would not have negotiated my bill of intellect, or given me a very small sum. I should have bound myself down for some time. 'Tis best to meet present misfortunes; not for a momentary good to sacrifice great benefits which one's own untrammell'd and free industry may bring one in the end. In all this do never think of me as in any way unhappy: I shall not be so. I have a great pleasure in thinking of my responsibility to you, and shall do myself the greatest luxury if I can succeed in any way so as to be of assistance to you. We shall look back upon these

*The name of this gentleman was Bakewell, a connection of Audubon's. He befriended George Keats at the beginning of his career, and after George Keats became a successful man he was able to repay Mr. Bakewell in kind. At George Keats's

death, his executors found that he had endorsed Mr. Bakewell's paper to such an extent that the accumulations of an enterprising and thrifty lifetime were swept away in making good the endorsements.

times, even before our eyes are at all dim—I am convinced of it. But be careful of those Americans. I could almost advise you to come whenever you have the sum of £500 to England. Those Americans will, I am afraid, still fleece you. If ever you think of such a thing, you must bear in mind the very different state of society here,—the immense difficulties of the times, the great sum required per annum to maintain yourself in any decency. In fact, the whole is with Providence. I know not how to advise you but by advising you to advise with yourself. In your next tell me at large your thoughts about America,—what chance there is of succeeding there, for it appears to me you have as yet been somehow deceived. I cannot help thinking Mr. Audubon has deceived you. I shall not like the sight of him. I shall endeavour to avoid seeing him. You see how puzzled I am. I have no meridian to fix you to, being the slave of what is to happen. I think I may bid you, finally, remain in good hopes, and not tease yourself with my changes and variations of mind. If I say nothing decisive in any one particular part of my letter, you may glean the truth from the whole pretty correctly. You may wonder why I had not put your affairs with Abbey in train on receiving your letter before last, to which there will reach you a short answer dated from Shanklin. I did write and speak to Abbey, but to no purpose. Your last, with the enclosed note, has appealed home to him. He will not see the necessity of a thing till he is hit in the mouth. 'Twill be effectual.

I am sorry to mix up foolish and serious things together, but in writing so much I am obliged to do so, and I hope sincerely the tenor of your mind will maintain itself better. In the course of a few months I shall be as good an Italian scholar as I am a French one. I am reading Ariosto at present, not managing more than six or eight stanzas at a time. When I have done this language, so as to be able to read it tolerably well, I shall set myself to get complete in Latin, and there my learning must stop. I do not think of returning upon Greek. I would not go even so far if I were not persuaded of the power the knowledge of any language gives one. The fact is, I like to be acquainted with foreign languages. It is, besides, a nice way of filling up intervals, &c. Also, the reading of Dante is well worth the while; and in Latin there is a fund of curious literature of the Middle Ages, the works of many great men—Aretino and Sanazaro and Machiavelli. I shall never become attach'd to a foreign idiom, so as to put it into my writings. The "*Paradise Lost*," though so fine in itself, is a corruption of our language. It should be kept as it is—unique, a curiosity, a beautiful and grand curiosity, the most remarkable production of the world; a northern dialect accommodating itself to Greek and Latin inversions and intonations. The purest English, I think,—or what ought to be the purest,—is Chatterton's. The language had existed long enough to be entirely uncorrupted of Chaucer's Gallicisms, and still the old words are used. Chatterton's language is entirely northern. I prefer the native

music of it to Milton's, cut by feet. I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me. Miltonic verse cannot be written, but is the verse of art. I wish to devote myself to another verse alone.

I have been obliged to intermit your letter for two days (this being Friday morning), from having had to attend to other correspondence. Brown, who was at Bedhampton, went thence to Chichester, and I still directing my letters Bedhampton. There arose a misunderstanding about them. I began to suspect my letters had been stopped from curiosity. However, yesterday, Brown had four letters from me all in a dump, and the matter is cleared up. Brown complained very much in his letter to me of yesterday of the great alteration the disposition of Dilke has undergone. He thinks of nothing but politickal justice and his boy. Now, the first politickal duty a man ought to have a mind to is the happiness of his friends. I wrote Brown a comment on the subject, wherein I explained what I thought of Dilke's character, which resolved itself into this conclusion: that Dilke was a man who cannot feel he has a personal identity unless he has made up his mind about everything. The only means of strengthening one's intellect is to make up one's mind about nothing—to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts, not a select party. The genus is not scarce in population; all the stubborn arguers you meet with are of the same brood. They never begin upon a subject they have not preresolved on. They want to hammer their nail into you, and if you have the

point, still they think you wrong. Dilke will never come at a truth as long as he lives, because he is always trying at it. He is a God-wise Methodist.

I must not forget to mention that your mother show'd me the lock of hair — 'tis of a very dark colour for so young a creature. Then it is two feet in length. I shall not stand a barley-corn higher. That's not fair; one ought to go on growing as well as others. At the end of this sheet I shall stop for the present and send it off. You may expect another letter immediately after it. As I never know the day of the month but by chance, I put here that this is *the 24th September*.

I would wish you here to stop your ears, for I have a word or two to say to your wife.

MY DEAR SISTER :

In the first place I must quarrel with you for sending me such a shabby piece of paper, though that is in some degree made up for by the beautiful impression of the seal. You should like to know what I was doing the first of May. Let me see. I cannot recollect. I have all the "Examiners" ready to send — they will be a great treat to you when they reach you. I shall pack them up when my business with Abbey has come to a good conclusion, and the remittance is on the road to you. I have dealt round your best wishes like a pack of cards, but being always given to cheat myself, I have turned up ace. You see I am making game of you. I see you are not all happy in that America. England, however, would not be over happy for us if you were here. Perhaps 'twould

be better to be teased here than there. I must preach patience to you both. No step hasty or injurious to you must be taken. You say let one large sheet be all to me. You will find more than that in different parts of this packet for you. Certainly, I have been caught in rains. A catch in the rain occasioned my last sore throat ; but as for red-haired girls, upon my word, I do not recollect ever having seen one. Are you quizzing me or Miss Waldegrave when you talk of promenading ? As for pun-making, I wish it was as good a trade as pin-making. There is very little business of that sort going on now. We struck for wages, like the Manchester weavers, but to no purpose. So we are all out of employ. I am more lucky than some, you see, by having an opportunity of exporting a few—getting into a little foreign trade, which is a comfortable thing. I wish one could get change for a pun in silver currency. I would give three and a half any night to get into Drury pit, but they won't ring at all. No more will notes, you will say ; but notes are different things, though they make together a pun-note, as the term goes. If I were your son, I shouldn't mind you, though you rapt me with the scissors. But, Lord ! I should be out of favour when the little un be comm'd. You have made an uncle of me, you have, and I don't know what to make of myself. I suppose next there will be a nevey. You say in my last, write directly. I have not received your letter above 10 days. The thought of your little girl puts me in mind of a thing I heard a Mr. Lamb say. A child in arms was passing by towards its mother, in the nurse's

arms. Lamb took hold of the long clothes, saying: "Where, God bless me, where does it leave off?"

Saturday.—If you would prefer a joke or two to anything else, I have two for you, fresh hatched, just ris, as the bakers' wives say by the rolls. The first I played off on Brown; the second I played on myself. Brown when he left me, "Keats," says he, "my good fellow (staggering upon his left heel and fetching an irregular pirouette with his right); "Keats," says he (depressing his left eyebrow and elevating his right one), tho' by the way at the moment I did not know which was the right one; "Keats," says he (still in the same posture, but furthermore, both his hands in his waistcoat pockets and putting out his stomach), "Keats—my—go-o-ood fell-o-o-o-oh," says he (interlarding his exclamation with certain ventriloquial parentheses),—no, this is all a lie. He was as sober as a judge, when a judge happens to be sober, and said: "Keats, if any letters come for me do not forward them, but open them and give me the marrow of them in a few words." At the time I wrote my first to him no letter had arrived. I thought I would invent one, and as I had not time to manufacture a long one, I dabbed off a short one, and that was the reason of the joke succeeding beyond my expectations. Brown let his house to a Mr. Benjamin—a Jew. Now, the water which furnishes the house is in a tank, sided with a composition of lime, and the lime impregnates the water unpleasantly. Taking advantage

of this circumstance, I pretended that Mr. Benjamin had written the following short note :

SIR: By drinking your damn'd tank water I have got the gravel. What reparation can you make to me and my family ?

NATHAN BENJAMIN.

By a fortunate hit, I hit upon his right—heathen name—his right pronomen. Brown in consequence, it appears, wrote to the surprised Mr. Benjamin the following :

SIR: I cannot offer you any remuneration until your gravel shall have formed itself into a stone—when I will cut you with pleasure.

C. BROWN.

This of Brown's, Mr. Benjamin has answered, insisting on an explanation of this singular circumstance. B. says when I read your letter and his following I roared; and in came Mr. Snook, who on reading them seem'd likely to burst the hoops of his fat sides. So the joke has told well.

Now for the one I played on myself. I must first give you the scene and the *dramatis personæ*. There are an old major and his youngish wife here in the next apartments to me. His bed-room door opens at an angle with my sitting-room door. Yesterday, I was reading as demurely as a parish clerk, when I heard a rap at the door. I got up and opened it; no one was to be seen. I listened, and heard some one in the major's room. Not content

with this, I went upstairs and down, looked in the cupboards, and watch'd. At last I set myself to read again, not quite so demurely, when there came a louder rap. I was determined to find out who it was. I looked out; the staircases were all silent. "This must be the major's wife," said I. "At all events I will see the truth." So I rapt me at the major's door and went in, to the utter surprise and confusion of the lady, who was in reality there. After a little explanation, which I can no more describe than fly, I made my retreat from her, convinced of my mistake. She is to all appearance a silly body, and is really surprised about it. She must have been, for I have discovered that a little girl in the house was the rapper. I assure you she has nearly made me sneeze. If the lady tells tits, I shall put a very grave and moral face on the matter with the old gentleman, and make his little boy a present of a humming-top.

MY DEAR GEORGE :

This Monday morning, the 27th, I have received your last, dated July 12th. You say you have not heard from England for three months. Then my letter from Shanklin, written I think at the end of June, has not reach'd you. You shall not have cause to think I neglect you. I have kept this back a little time in expectation of hearing from Mr. Abbey. You will say I might have remained in town to be Abbey's messenger in these affairs. That I offered him, but he in his answer convinced me he was anxious to bring the business to an issue. He observed, that by being himself the

agent in the whole, people might be more expeditious. You say you have not heard for three months, and yet your letters have the tone of knowing how our affairs are situated, by which I conjecture I acquainted you with them in a letter previous to the Shanklin one. That I may not have done. To be certain I will here state that it is in consequence of Mr. Jennings threatening a chancery suit that you have been kept from the receipt of monies and myself deprived of any help from Abbey. I am glad you say you keep up your spirits. I hope you make a true statement on that score. Still keep them up, for we are all young. I can only repeat here that you shall hear from me again immediately. Notwithstanding this bad intelligence, I have experienced some pleasure in receiving so correctly two letters from you, as it gives me, if I may so say, a distant idea of proximity. This last improves upon my little niece—kiss her for me. Do not fret yourself about the delay of money on account of my immediate opportunity being lost, for in a new country whoever has money must have an opportunity of employing it in many ways. The report runs now more in favour of Kean stopping in England. If he should, I have confident hopes of our tragedy. If he invokes the hot-blooded character of Ludolph,—and he is the only actor that can do it,—he will add to his own fame and improve my fortune. I will give you a half dozen lines of it before I part as a specimen :

Not as a swordsman would I pardon crave,
But as a son. The bronz'd centurion,

Long-toil'd in foreign wars, and whose high deeds
Are shaded in a forest of tall spears
Known only to his troop, hath greater plea
Of favour with my sire than I can have.

Believe, my dear brother and sister,
Your affectionate and anxious brother,
JOHN KEATS.

Audubon, the naturalist, cheated George Keats out of all the small fortune he took to America, and in the fall of 1819 he found it absolutely necessary that he should return to England and get what remained to him of his father's estate. He appeared in England early in the winter of 1819, and the following letter of John Keats to his sister-in-law gives some account of George Keats's visit. This is the most recent of the letters preserved by Mrs. Speed, and it is not at all likely that many more were written, for within a week after George Keats's second departure for America, John Keats's fatal illness began, as described by Lord Houghton: "One night, about eleven o'clock, Keats returned home in a state of strange physical excitement—it might have appeared to those who did not know him, one of fierce intoxication. He told his friends he had been outside the stage coach, had received a severe chill, was a little fevered, but added, 'I don't feel it now,' He was easily persuaded to go to bed, and as he leaped into the cold sheets, before his head was on the pillow, he slightly coughed and said, 'That is blood from my mouth; bring me the candle; let me see this blood.' He gazed steadfastly for some moments at the ruddy stain, and then looking into

his friend's face with an expression of sudden calmness never to be forgotten, said, 'I know the colour of that blood—it is arterial blood; I cannot be deceived in that colour; that drop is my death warrant. I must die!'"

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THURSDAY, Jan. 13, 1820.

MY DEAR SISTER :

By the time you receive this your trouble will be over. I wish you knew they were half over. I mean that George is safe in England and in good health. To write to you by him is almost like following one's own letter in the mail. That it may not be quite so, I will leave common intelligence out of the question, and write wide of him as I can. I fear I must be dull, having had no good-natured flip from Fortune's finger since I saw you, and no sideway comfort in the success of my friends. I could almost promise that if I had the means I would accompany George back to America, and pay you a visit of a few months. I should not think much of the time, or my absence from my books; or I have no right to think, for I am very idle. But then I ought to be diligent, and at least keep myself within the reach of materials for diligence. Diligence, that I do not mean to say; I should say dreaming over my books, or rather other people's books. George has promised to bring you to England when the five years have

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elapsed. I regret very much that I shall not be able to see you before that time, and even then I must hope that your affairs will be in so prosperous a way as to induce you to stop longer. Yours is a hardish fate, to be so divided from your friends and settled among a people you hate. You will find it improve. You have a heart that will take hold of your children; even George's absence will make things better. His return will banish what must be your greatest sorrow, and at the same time minor ones with it. Robinson Crusoe, when he saw himself in danger of perishing on the waters, looked back to his island as to the haven of his happiness, and on gaining it once more was more content with his solitude. We smoke George about his little girl. He runs the common-beaten road of every father, as I dare say you do of every mother: there is no child like his child, so original,—original forsooth! However, I take you at your words. I have a lively faith that yours is the very gem of all children. Aint I its uncle?

On Henry's marriage there was a piece of bride cake sent me. It missed its way. I suppose the carrier or coachman was a conjuror and wanted it for his own private use. Last Sunday, George and I dined at Millar's. There were your mother and Charles with Fool Lacon, Esqre., who sent the sly, disinterested shawl to Miss Millar, with his own heathen name engraved in the middle. Charles had a silk handkerchief belonging to a Miss Grover, with whom he pretended to be smitten, and for her sake kept exhibiting and adoring the handkerchief all the evening. Fool Lacon, Esqre., heated it with

a little venturesome, trembling contumely, whereon Charles set him quietly down on the floor, from where he as quietly got up. This process was repeated at supper time, when your mother said, "If I were you, Mr. Lacon, I would not let him do so." Fool Lacon, Esqre., did not offer any remark. He will undoubtedly die in his bed. Your mother did not look quite so well on Sunday. Mrs. Henry Wylie is excessively quiet before people. I hope she is always so. Yesterday we dined at Taylor's, in Fleet street. George left early after dinner to go to Deptford; he will make all square there for me. I could not go with him—I did not like the amusement. Haslam is a very good fellow indeed; he has been excessively anxious and kind to us. But is this fair? He has an innamorata at Deptford, and he has been wanting me for some time past to see her. This is a thing which it is impossible not to shirk. A man is like a magnet—he must have a repelling end. So how am I to see Haslam's lady and family, if I even went? for by the time I got to Greenwich I should have repell'd them to Blackheath, and by the time I got to Deptford they would be on Shooters' Hill; when I came to Shooters' Hill they would alight at Chatham, and so on till I drove them into the sea, which I think might be indictable. The evening before yesterday we had a piano-forte hop at Dilke's. There was very little amusement in the room, but a Scotchman to hate. Some people, you must have observed, have a most unpleasant effect upon you when you see them speaking in profile. This Scotchman is the

most accomplished fellow in this way I ever met with. The effect was complete. It went down like a dose of bitters, and I hope will improve my digestion. At Taylor's, too, there was a Scotchman,—not quite so bad, for he was as clean as he could get himself. Not having succeeded in Drury Lane with our tragedy, we have been making some alterations, and are about to try Covent Garden. Brown has just done patching up the copy—as it is altered. The reliance I had on it was in Kean's acting. I am *not* afraid it will be damn'd in the Garden. You said in one of your letters that there was nothing but Haydon & Co. in mine. There can be nothing of him in this, for I never see him or Co. George has introduced to us an American of the name of Hart. I like him in a moderate way. He was at Mrs. Dilke's party—and sitting by me; we began talking about English and American ladies. The Miss —— and some of their friends made not a very enticing row opposite us. I bade him mark them and form his judgement of them. I told him I hated Englishmen because they were the only men I knew. He does not understand this. Who would be Bragadosio to Johnny Bull? Johnny's house is his castle—and a precious dull castle it is; what a many Bull castles there are in so and so crescent! I never wish myself an unversed writer and newsmonger but when I write to you. I should like for a day or two to have somebody's knowledge—Mr. Lacon's, for instance—of all the different folks of a wide acquaintance, to tell you about. Only let me have his knowledge of family minutiae and I would set them in a

proper light; but, bless me, I never go anywhere. My pen is no more garrulous than my tongue. Any third person would think I was addressing myself to a lover of scandal. But we know we do not love scandal, but fun; and if scandal happens to be fun, that is no fault of ours. There were very good pickings for me in George's letters about the prairie settlement, if I had any taste to turn them to account in England. I knew a friend of Miss Andrews, yet I never mentioned her to him; for after I had read the letter I really did not recollect her story. Now I have been sitting here a half hour, with my invention at work, to say something about your mother or Charles or Henry, but it is in vain. I know not what to say. Three nights since, George went with your mother to the play. I hope she will soon see mine acted. I do not remember ever to have thanked you for your tassels to my Shakspeare—there he hangs so ably supported opposite me. I thank you now. It is a continual memento of you. If you should have a boy, do not christen him John, and persuade George not to let his partiality for me come across.¹ 'Tis a bad name, and goes against a man. If my name had been Edmund, I should have been more fortunate.

I was surprised to hear of the state of society at Louisville; it seems you are just as ridiculous there as we are here—threepenny parties, half-penny dances. The best thing I have heard of is your shooting; for it seems you follow the gun. Give

¹ George Keats's eldest son. He is still living, and is at present a farmer in Missouri.

my compliments to Mrs. Audubon, and tell her I cannot think her either good-looking or honest. Tell Mr. Audubon he's a fool, and Briggs that 'tis well I was not Mr. A——.

SATURDAY, Jan 15.

It is strange that George, having to stop so short a time in England, I should not have seen him for nearly two days. He has been to Haslam's, and does not encourage me to follow his example. He had given promise to dine with the same party to-morrow, but has sent an excuse which I am glad of, as we shall have a pleasant party with us to-morrow. We expect Charles here to-day. This is a beautiful day. I hope you will not quarrel with it if I call it an American one. The sun comes upon the snow and makes a prettier candy than we have on twelfth-night cakes. George is busy this morning in making copies of my verses. He is making one now of an "Ode to the Nightingale," which is like reading an account of the Black Hole at Calcutta on an ice-bergh.

You will say this is a matter of course. I am glad it is—I mean that I should like your brothers more the more I know them. I should spend much more time with them if our lives were more run in parallel; but we can talk but on one subject—that is you.

The more I know of men the more I know how to value entire liberality in any of them. Thank God, there are a great many who will sacrifice their worldly interest for a friend. I wish there were more who would sacrifice their passions. The

See vol. III. p. 8.

worst of men are those whose self-interests are their passion ; the next, those whose passions are their self-interest. Upon the whole, I dislike mankind. Whatever people on the other side of the question may advance, they cannot deny that they are always surprised at hearing of a good action and never of a bad one. I am glad you have something to like in America—doves. “Gertrude of Wyoming” and Birkbeck’s book should be bound up together like a brace of decoy ducks—one is almost as poetical as the other. Precious miserable people at the prairie. I have been sitting in the sun whilst I wrote this till it’s become quite oppressive—this is very odd for January. The vulcan fire is the true natural heat for winter. The sun has nothing to do in winter but to give a little glooming light much like a shade. Our Irish servant has piqued me this morning by saying that her father in Ireland was very much like my Shakspeare, only he had more colour than the engraving. You will find on George’s return that I have not been neglecting your affairs. The delay was unfortunate, not faulty. Perhaps by this time you have received my three last letters, not one of which had reach’d before George sail’d. I would give two-pence to have been over the world as much as he has. I wish I had money enough to do nothing but travel about for years. Were you now in England I dare say you would be able (setting aside the pleasure you would have in seeing your mother) to suck out more amusement for society than I am able to do. To me it is all as dull here as Louisville could be. I am tired of the theatres. Almost all the parties

I may chance to fall into I know by heart. I know the different styles of talk in different places,— what subjects will be started, how it will proceed like an acted play, from the first to the last act. If I go to Hunt's, I run my head into many tunes heard before, old puns, and old music; to Haydon's, worn-out discourses of poetry and painting. The Miss — I am afraid to speak to, for fear of some sickly reiteration of phrase or sentiment. When they were at the dance the other night I tried manfully to sit near and talk to them, but to no purpose; and if I had I would have been to no purpose still. My question or observation must have been an old one, and the rejoinder very antique indeed. At Dilke's I fall foul of politicks. 'Tis best to remain aloof from people and like their good parts without being eternally troubled with the dull process of their every-day lives. When once a person has smoked the vapidness of the routine of society he must either have self-interest or the love of some sort of distinction to keep him in good humour with it. All I can say is that, standing at Charing Cross and looking east, west, north, and south, I can see nothing but dullness. I hope while I am young to live retired in the country. When I grow in years and have a right to be idle, I shall enjoy cities more. If the American ladies are worse than the English, they must be very bad. You say you should like your Emily brought up here. You had better bring her up yourself. You know a good number of English ladies; what encomium could you give of half a dozen of them? The greater part seem to me downright American. I have

known more than one Mrs. Audubon. Her affectation of fashion and politeness cannot transcend ours. Look at our Cheapside tradesmen's sons and daughters—only fit to be taken off by a plague. I hope now soon to come to the time when I shall never be forced to walk through the city and hate as I walk.

MONDAY, Jan. 17.

George had a quick rejoinder to his letter of excuse to Haslam, so we had not his company yesterday, which I was sorry for, as there was our old set. I know three witty people all distinct in their excellence—Rice, Reynolds, and Richards. Rice is the wisest, Reynolds the playfullest, Richards the out-o'-the-wayest. The first makes you laugh and think, the second makes you laugh and not think, the third puzzles your head. I admire the first, I enjoy the second, I stare at the third. The first is claret, the second ginger beer, the third *crème de Byrappymdrag*. The first is inspired by Minerva, the second by Mercury, the third by Harlequin Epigram, Esq. The first is neat in his dress, the second slovenly, the third uncomfortable. The first speaks *adagio*, the second *allegretto*, the third both together. The first is Swiftean, the second Tomcribean, the third Shandean. And yet these three eaus are not three eaus, but one eau.

Charles came on Saturday, but went early; he seems to have schemes and plans, and wants to get off. He is quite right; I am glad to see him employed at business. You remember I wrote you a story about a woman named Alice being made young again, or some such stuff. In your next

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letter tell me whether I gave it as my own, or whether I gave it as a matter Brown was employed upon at the time. He read it over to George the other day, and George said he had heard it all before. So Brown suspects I have been giving you his story as my own. I should like to set him right in it by your evidence. George has not returned from town; when he does I shall tax his memory. We had a young, long, raw, lean Scotchman with us yesterday, call'd Thornton. Rice, for fun or for mistake, would persist in calling him Stevenson. I know three people of no wit at all, each distinct in his excellence — A, B, and C. A is the coolest, B the sultriest, C is a negative. A makes you yawn, B makes you hate; as for C, you never see him, though he is six feet high. I bear the first, I forbear the second, I am not certain that the third is. The first is gruel, the second ditch-water, the third is spilt — he ought to be wip'd up. A is inspired by Jack-o'-the-clock, B has been drilled by a Russian sargeant; C, they say, is not his mother's true child, but she bought him of the man who cries, "Young lambs to sell." Twang-dillo-dee. This, you must know, is the amen to nonsense. I know a good many places where amen should be scratched out, rubbed over with ponce made of Momus's little finger bones, and in its place Twang-dillo-dee written. This is the word I shall be tempted to write at the end of most modern poems. Every American book ought to have it. It would be a good distinction in society. My Lords Wellington and Castlereagh, and Canning, and many more, would do well to wear Twang-dillo-dee written

on their backs, instead of wearing ribbons in their button-holes. How many people would go sideways along walls and quickset hedges to keep their "Twang-dillo-dee" out of sight, or wear large pig-tails to hide it. However, there would be so many that the Twang-dillo-dees would keep one another in countenance — which Brown cannot do for me. I have fallen away lately. Thieves and murderers would gain rank in the world, for would any one of them have the poorness of spirit to condescend to be a Twang-dillo-dee? "I have robbed many a dwelling-house; I have killed many a fowl, many a goose, and many a Man (would such a gentleman say), but, thank Heaven, I was never yet a Twang-dillo-dee." Some philosophers in the moon, who spy at our globe as we do at theirs, say that Twang-dillo-dee is written in large letters on our globe of earth; they say the beginning of the "T" is just on the spot where London stands, London being built within the flourish; "wan" reaches downward and slants as far as Timbuctoo in Africa; the tail of the "g" goes slap across the Atlantic into the Rio della Plata; the remainder of the letters wrap around New Holland, and the last "e" terminates in land we have not yet discovered. However, I must be silent; these are dangerous times to libel a man in — much more a world.

* * * * *

I will send you a close written sheet on the first of next month; but for fear of missing the mail, I must finish here. God bless you, my dear sister.

Your affectionate brother,

JOHN KEATS.





LETTERS TO HIS FRIENDS

No. 1.

TO HAYDON.

MY DEAR SIR :

Your letter has filled me with a proud pleasure, and shall be kept by me as a stimulus to exertion. I begin to fix my eyes on an horizon. My feelings entirely fall in with yours with regard to the ellipsis, and I glory in it. The idea of your sending it to Wordsworth* puts me out of breath—you know with what reverence I would send my well-wishes to him.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN KEATS.

* In regard to Keats's opinion of Wordsworth, see H. & A., p. 43.

No. 2.^a

MY DEAR REYNOLDS :

My brothers are anxious that I should go by myself into the country; they have always been extremely fond of me, and now that Haydon has

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^a Mr. Haydon seems to have been to him a wise and prudent counsellor, and to have encouraged him to trace his powers by undistracted study, while he advised him to leave London for a while, and take more care of his health. The following note, written in March [1817], shows what Keats said as to his recommendation.

pointed out how necessary it is that I should be alone to improve myself, they give up the temporary pleasure of being with me continually for a great good which I hope will follow ; so I shall soon be out of town. You must soon bring all your present troubles to a close, and so must I, but we must, like the fox, prepare for a fresh swarm of flies. Banish money — banish sofas — banish wine — banish music ; but right Jack Health, honest Jack Health, true Jack Health. Banish Health and banish all the world.

Your sincere friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 3.

CARISBROOKE, April 17th, 1817.

MY DEAR REYNOLDS :

Ever since I wrote to my brother from Southampton, I have been in a taking, and at this moment I am about to become settled, for I have unpacked my books, put them into a snug corner, pinned up Haydon, Mary Queen [of] Scots, and Milton with his daughters in a row. In the passage I found a head of Shakspeare, which I had not before seen. It is most likely the same that George spoke so well of, for I like it extremely. Well, this head I have hung over my books, just above the three in a row, having first discarded a French ambassador ; now this alone is a good morning's work. Yesterday I went to Shanklin, which occasioned a great debate in my mind whether I

should live there or at Carisbrooke. Shanklin is a most beautiful place; sloping wood and meadow ground reach round the Chine, which is a cleft between the cliffs, of the depth of nearly 300 feet, at least. This cleft is filled with trees and bushes in the narrow part; and as it widens becomes bare, if it were not for primroses on one side, which spread to the very verge of the sea, and some fishermen's huts on the other, perched midway in the balustrades of beautiful green hedges along the steps down to the sands. But the sea, Jack, the sea, the little waterfall, then the white cliff, then St. Catherine's Hill, "the sheep in the meadows, the cows in the corn." Then why are you at Carisbrooke? say you. Because, in the first place, I should be at twice the expense and three times the inconvenience; next, that from here I can see your continent from a little hill close by, the whole north angle of the Isle of Wight, with the water between us; in the third place, I see Carisbrooke Castle from my window, and have found several delightful wood alleys and copses, and quiet freshes; as for primroses, the island ought to be called Primrose Island; that is, if the nation of cowslips agree thereto, of which there are divers clans just beginning to lift up their heads. Another reason of my fixing is, that I am more in reach of the places around me. I intend to walk over the island, east, west, north, south. I have not seen many specimens of ruins. I don't think, however, I shall ever see one to surpass Carisbrooke Castle. The trench is overgrown with the smoothest turf, and the walls with ivy. The keep within side is one bower of ivy; a colony

of jackdaws have been there for many years. I dare say I have seen many a descendant of some old cawer who peeped through the bars at Charles the First, when he was there in confinement. On the road from Cowes to Newport I saw some extensive barracks, which disgusted me extremely with the Government for placing such a nest of debauchery in so beautiful a place. I asked a man on the coach about this, and he said that the people had been spoiled. In the room where I slept at Newport, I found this on the window: "O Isle spoilt by the military!"

The wind is in a sulky fit, and I feel that it would be no bad thing to be the favourite of some fairy, who would give one the power of seeing how our friends got on at a distance. I should like, of all loves, a sketch of you and Tom and George, in ink, which Haydon will do if you tell him how I want them. From want of regular rest I have been rather *nervus*, and the passage in Lear, "Do you not hear the sea?" has haunted me intensely.

"It keeps eternal whisperings around," &c.*

April 18th.

I'll tell you what — on the 23d was Shakspeare born. Now if I should receive a letter from you, and another from my brother on that day, 'twould be a parlous good thing. Whenever you write, say a word or two on some passage in Shakspeare that may have come rather new to you, which must be continually happening, notwithstanding that we

* See the Poems.

read the same play forty times— for instance, the following from the “*Tempest*” never struck me so forcibly as at present :

“Urchins

Shall, for that vast of night that they may work,
All exercise on thee.”

How can I help bringing to your mind the line

“In the dark backward and abysm of time”?

I find I cannot exist without poetry—without eternal poetry; half the day will not do the whole of it. I began with a little, but habit has made me a leviathan. I had become all in a tremble from not having written any thing of late: the sonnet over-leaf (*i. e.*, on the preceding page) did me good; I slept the better last night for it; this morning, however, I am nearly as bad again. Just now I opened Spenser, and the first lines I saw were these :

“The noble heart that harbours virtuous thought
And is with child of glorious great intent,
Can never rest until it forth have brought
Th’ eternal brood of glory excellent.”

Let me know particularly about Haydon; ask him to write to me about Hunt, if it be only ten lines. I hope all is well. I shall forthwith begin my “*Endymion*,” which I hope I shall have got some way with before you come, when we will read our verses in a delightful place I have set my heart upon, near the Castle. Give my love to your sisters severally.

Your sincere friend,

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JOHN KEATS.

No. 4.

(Without date, but written early in May, 1817.)

MARGATE.

MY DEAR HAYDON:

"Let Fame, that all pant after in their lives,
Live registered upon our brazen tombs,
And so grace us in the disguise of death;
When, spite of cormorant devouring Time,
The endeavour of this present breath may bring
That honour which shall bate his scythe's keen edge,
And make us heirs of all eternity."

To think that I have no right to couple myself with you in this speech would be death to me, so I have e'en written it, and I pray God that our "brazen tombs" be nigh neighbours. It cannot be long first; the "endeavour of this present breath" will soon be over, and yet it is as well to breathe freely during our sojourn—it is as well if you have not been teased with that money affair, that bill-pestilence. However, I must think that difficulties nerve the spirit of a man; they make our prime objects a refuge as well as a passion; the trumpet of Fame is as a tower of strength; the ambitious bloweth it, and is safe. I suppose, by your telling me not to give way to forebodings, George has been telling you what I have lately said in my letters to him; truth is, I have been in such a state of mind as to read over my lines and to hate them. I am one that "gathereth samphire, dreadful trade"; the cliff of poetry towers above me; yet when my brother reads some of Pope's "Homer," or Plutarch's

"Lives," they seem like music to mine. I read and write about eight hours a day. There is an old saying, "Well begun is half done"; 'tis a bad one; I would use instead, "Not begun at all till half done"; so, according to that, I have not begun my poem, and consequently, *à priori*, can say nothing about it. Thank God, I do begin ardently, when I leave off, notwithstanding my occasional depressions, and I hope for the support of a high power while I climb this little eminence, and especially in my years of momentous labour. I remember your saying that you had notions of a good genius presiding over you. I have lately had the same thought, for things which, done half at random, are afterwards confirmed by my judgment in a dozen features of propriety. Is it too daring to fancy Shakspeare this presider? When in the Isle of Wight I met with a Shakspeare in the passage of the house at which I lodged. It comes nearer to my idea of him than any I have seen; I was but there a week, yet the old woman made me take it with me, though I went off in a hurry. Do you not think this ominous of good? I am glad you say every man of great views is at times tormented as I am.

(Sunday after.) This morning I received a letter from George, by which it appears that money troubles are to follow up for some time to come — perhaps for always: those vexations are a great hinderance to one; they are not, like envy and detraction, stimulants to further exertions, as being immediately relative and reflected on at the same time with the prime object; but rather like a nettle-

leaf or two in your bed. So now I revoke my promise of finishing my poem by autumn, which I should have done had I gone on as I have done. But I cannot write while my spirit is fevered in a contrary direction, and I am now sure of having plenty of it this summer; at this moment I am in no enviable situation. I feel that I am not in a mood to write any to-day, and it appears that the loss of it is the beginning of all sorts of irregularities. I am extremely glad that a time must come when everything will leave not a wreck behind. You tell me never to despair. I wish it was as easy for me to observe this saying: truth is, I have a horrid morbidity of temperament, which has shown itself at intervals; it is, I have no doubt, the greatest stumbling-block I have to fear; I may surer say, it is likely to be the cause of my disappointment. However, every ill has its share of good; this, my bane, would at any time enable me to look with an obstinate eye on the very devil himself, or to be as proud to be the lowest of the human race as Alfred would be in being of the highest. I am very sure that you do love me as your very brother. I have seen it in your continual anxiety for me, and I assure you that your welfare and fame is, and will be, a chief pleasure to me all my life. I know no one but you who can be fully aware of the turmoil and anxiety, the sacrifice of all that is called comfort, the readiness to measure time by what is done, and to die in six hours, could plans be brought to conclusions; the looking on the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, and its contents, as materials to form greater things, that is to

say, ethereal things,— but here I am talking like a madman,— greater things than our Creator himself made.

I wrote to — yesterday : scarcely know what I said in it ; I could not talk about poetry in the way I should have liked, for I was not in humour with either his or mine. There is no greater sin, after the seven deadly, than to flatter one's self into the idea of being a great poet, or one of those beings who are privileged to wear out their lives in the pursuit of honour. How comfortable a thing it is to feel that such a crime must bring its heavy penalty, that if one be a self-deluder, accounts must be balanced ! I am glad you are hard at work ; it will now soon be done. I long to see Wordsworth's, as well as to have mine in ; but I would rather not show my face in town till the end of the year, if that would be time enough ; if not, I shall be disappointed if you do not write me ever when you think best. I never quite despair, and I read Shakspeare,— indeed, I shall, I think, never read any other book much ; now this might lead me into a very long confab, but I desist. I am very near agreeing with Hazlitt, that Shakspeare is enough for us. By the by, what a tremendous Southean article this last was. I wish he had left out "gray hairs." It was very gratifying to meet your remarks on the manuscript. I was reading Antony and Cleopatra when I got the paper, and there are several passages applicable to the events you commentate. You say that he arrived by degrees, and not by any single struggle, to the height of his ambition, and that his life had been as common

in particular as other men's. Shakspeare makes Enobarbus say

"Where's Antony?

Eros. He's walking in the garden, and *spurns*
The rush before him; cries, *Fool, Lepidus!*"

In the same scene we find —

"Let determined things
To destiny hold unbewailed their way."

Dolabella says of Antony's messenger :

"An argument that he is plucked, when hither
He sends so poor a pinion of his wing."

Then again Enobarbus :

"men's judgments are
A parcel of their fortunes ; and things outward
Do draw the inward quality after them,
To suffer all alike."

The following applies well to Bertrand :

"Yet he that can endure
To follow with allegiance a fallen lord,
Does conquer him, that did his master conquer,
And earns a place i' the story."

'Tis good, too, that the Duke of Wellington has a good word or so in the "Examiner"; a man ought to have the fame he deserves; and I begin to think that detracting from him is the same thing as from Wordsworth. I wish he (Wordsworth) had a little more taste, and did not in that respect

"deal in lieutenantry." You should have heard from me before this; but, in the first place, I did not like to do so before I had got a little way in the first book, and in the next, as G. told me you were going to write, I delayed till I heard from you. So now, in the name of Shakspeare, Raphael, and all our saints, I commend you to the care of Heaven.

Your everlasting friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 5.

In the early part of May, it appears from the following extract of a letter to Mr. Hunt,² written from Margate, that the sojourn in the Isle of Wight had not answered his expectations, nor did he enjoy his own company :

"I went to the Isle of Wight, thought so much about poetry, so long together, that I could not get to sleep at night; and, moreover, I know not how it is, I could not get wholesome food. By this means, in a week or so I became not over capable in my upper stories, and set off pell-mell for Margate, at least a hundred and fifty miles, because, forsooth, I fancied I should like my old lodgings here and could continue to do without trees. Another thing, I was too much in solitude, and consequently was obliged to be in continual burning of thought as an only resource. However, Tom is

² Given entire in the first volume of "Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries."

with me at present, and we are very comfortable. We intend, though, to get among some trees. How have you got on among them? How are the nymphs?—I suppose they have led you a fine dance. Where are you now?

“I have asked myself so often why I should be a poet more than other men, seeing how great a thing it is, how great things are to be gained by it, what a thing to be in the mouth of Fame, that at last the idea has grown so monstrously beyond my seeming power of attainment, that the other day I nearly consented with myself to drop into a phaeton. Yet 'tis a disgrace to fail even in a huge attempt, and at this moment I drive the thought from me. I begun my poem about a fortnight since, and have done some every day, except travelling ones. Perhaps I may have done a good deal for the time, but it appears such a pin's point to me that I will not copy any out. When I consider that so many of these pin-points go to form a bodkin-point (God send I end not my life with a bare bodkin, in its modern sense), and that it requires a thousand bodkins to make a spear bright enough to throw any light to posterity, I see nothing but continual uphill journeying. Nor is there anything more unpleasant (it may come among the thousand and one) than to be so journeying and to miss the goal at last. But I intend to whistle all these cogitations into the sea, where I hope they will breed storms violent enough to block up all exit from Russia.

“Does Shelley go on telling ‘strange stories of the deaths of kings?’ Tell him there are strange

stories of the death of poets. Some have died before they were conceived. 'How do you make that out, Master Vellum?' "

No. 6.

TO MR. TAYLOR, HIS PUBLISHER.

MARGATE, May 16th, 1817.

MY DEAR SIR :

I am extremely indebted to you for your liberality in the shape of manufactured rag, value £20, and shall immediately proceed to destroy some of the minor heads of that hydra, the Dun ; to conquer which the knight need have no sword, shield, cuirass, cuisses, herbadgeon, spear, casque, greaves, paldrons, spurs, chevron, or any other scaly commodity, but he need only take the Bank-note of Faith and Cash of Salvation, and set out against the monster, invoking the aid of no Archimago or Urganda, but finger me the paper, light as the Sybil's leaves in Virgil, whereat the fiend skulks off with his tail between his legs. Touch him with this enchanted paper, and he whips you his head away as fast as a snail's horn ; but then the horrid propensity he has to put it up again has discouraged many very valiant knights. He is such a never-ending, still-beginning, sort of a body, like my landlady of the Bell. I think I could make a nice little allegorical poem, called "The Dun," where we would have the Castle of Carelessness, the Drawbridge of Credit, Sir Novelty Fashion's expedition

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against the City of Tailors, &c., &c. I went day by day at my poem for a month; at the end of which time, the other day, I found my brain so overwrought that I had neither rhyme nor reason in it, so was obliged to give up for a few days. I hope soon to be able to resume my work. I have endeavoured to do so once or twice, but to no purpose. Instead of poetry, I have a swimming in my head, and feel all the effects of a mental debauch, lowness of spirits, anxiety to go on, without the power to do so, which does not at all tend to my ultimate progression. However, to-morrow I will begin my next month. This evening I go to Canterbury, having got tired of Margate; I was not right in my head when I came. At Canterbury I hope the remembrance of Chaucer will set me forward like a billiard ball. I have some idea of seeing the Continent some time this summer.

In repeating how sensible I am of your kindness, I remain, your obedient servant and friend,

JOHN KEATS.

I shall be happy to hear any little intelligence in the literary or friendly way when you have time to scribble.

No. 7.

TO THE SAME.

10th July, 1817.

MY DEAR SIR :

A couple of duns that I thought would be silent till the beginning, at least, of next month (when I am

certain to be on my legs, for certain sure), have opened upon me with a cry most "untunable"; never did you hear such "ungallant chiding." Now, you must know, I am not so desolate, but have, thank God, twenty-five good notes in my fob. But then, you know, I laid them by to write with, and would stand at bay a fortnight ere they should quit me. In a month's time I must pay, but it would relieve my mind if I owed you, instead of these pelican duns.

I am afraid you will say I have "wound about with circumstance," when I should have asked plainly. However, as I said, I am a little maidenish or so, and I feel my virginity come strong upon me the while I request the loan of a £20 and £10, which, if you would inclose to me, I would acknowledge and save myself a hot forehead. I am sure you are confident of my responsibility, and in the sense of squareness that is always in me.

Your obliged friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 8.

In September, he visited his friend Bailey at Oxford, and wrote thus :

"Believe me, my dear —, it is a great happiness to see that you are, in this finest part of the year, winning a little enjoyment from the hard world. In truth, the great elements we know of are no mean comforters : the open sky sits upon our

senses like a sapphire crown ; the air is our robe of state ; the earth is our throne ; and the sea a mighty minstrel playing before it — able, like David's harp, to make such a one as you forget almost the tempest cares of life. I have found in the ocean's music—varying (the self-same) more than the passion of Timotheus—an enjoyment not to be put into words ; and, ' though inland far I be,' I now hear the voice most audibly while pleasing myself in the idea of your sensations.

"—— is getting well apace, and if you have a few trees, and a little harvesting about you, I'll snap my fingers in Lucifer's eye. I hope you bathe too ; if you do not, I earnestly recommend it. Bathe thrice a week, and let us have no more sitting up next winter. Which is the best of Shakespeare's plays ? I mean in what mood and with what accompaniment do you like the sea best ? It is very fine in the morning, when the sun,

' Opening on Neptune with fair blessed beams,
Turns into yellow gold his salt sea streams ;'

and superb when

' The Sun from meridian height
Illumines the depth of the sea,
And the fishes, beginning to sweat,
Cry d—— it ! how hot we shall be ;'

and gorgeous when the fair planet hastens

' To his home
Within the Western foam.'

But don't you think there is something extremely fine after sunset, when there are a few white clouds about, and a few stars blinking; when the waters are ebbing, and the horizon a mystery? This state of things has been so fulfilling to me that I am anxious to hear whether it is a favourite with you. So when you and —— club your letter to me, put in a word or two about it. Tell Dilke that it would be perhaps as well if he left a pheasant or partridge alive here and there to keep up a supply of game for next season; tell him to rein in, if possible, all the Nimrod of his disposition, he being a mighty hunter before the Lord of the manor. Tell him to shoot fair, and not to have at the poor devils in a furrow: when they are flying he may fire, and nobody will be the wiser.

“Give my sincerest respects to Mrs. Dilke, saying that I have not forgiven myself for not having got her the little box of medicine I promised, and that, had I remained at Hampstead, I would have made precious havoc with her house and furniture — drawn a great harrow over her garden — poisoned Boxer — eaten her clothes-pegs — fried her cabbages — fricaseed (how is it spelt?) her radishes — ragouted her onions — belabored her *beat-root* — outstripped her scarlet-runners — *parlez-vous'd* with her French-beans — devoured her mignon or mignonette — metamorphosed her bell-handles — splintered her looking-glasses — bullocked at her cups and saucers — agonized her decanters — put old P — to pickle in the brine-tub — disorganized her piano — dislocated her candlesticks — emptied her wine-bins in a fit of despair — turned out her

maid to grass—and astonished B——, whose letter to her on these events I would rather see than the original copy of the Book of Genesis.

“Poor Bailey, scarcely ever well, has gone to bed, pleased that I am writing to you. To your brother John (whom henceforth I shall consider as mine) and to you, my dear friends, I shall ever feel grateful for having made known to me so real a fellow as Bailey. He delights me in the selfish and (please God) the disinterested part of my disposition. If the old poets have any pleasure in looking down at the enjoyers of their works, their eyes must bend with a double satisfaction upon him. I sit as at a feast when he is over them, and pray that if, after my death, any of my labours should be worth saving, they may have so ‘honest a chronicler’ as Bailey. Out of this, his enthusiasm in his own pursuit and for all good things is of an exalted kind—worthy a more healthful frame and an untorn spirit. He must have happy years to come—‘he shall not die, by God.’

“A letter from John the other day was a chief happiness to me. I made a little mistake when, just now, I talked of being far inland. How can that be, when Endymion and I are at the bottom of the sea? whence I hope to bring him in safety before you leave the sea-side; and, if I can so contrive it, you shall be greeted by him upon the sea-sands, and he shall tell you all his adventures, which having finished, he shall thus proceed: ‘My dear ladies, favourites of my gentle mistress, however my friend Keats may have teased and vexed you, believe me he loves you not the less—for

instance, I am deep in his favour, and yet he has been hauling me through the earth and sea with unrelenting perseverance. I know for all this that he is mighty fond of me, by his contriving me all sorts of pleasures. Nor is this the least, fair ladies, this one of meeting you on the desert shore, and greeting you in his name. He sends you, moreover, this little scroll.' My dear girls, I send you, per favor of Endymion, the assurance of my esteem for you, and my utmost wishes for your health and pleasure, being ever,

"Your affectionate brother,
"JOHN KEATS."

No. 9.

OXFORD, Sunday Morning.

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:

So you are determined to be my mortal foe—draw a sword at me, and I will forgive—put a bullet in my brain, and I will shake it out as a dew-drop from the lion's mane—put me on a gridiron, and I will fry with great complacency—but—oh, horror! to come upon me in the shape of a dun!—send me bills! As I say to my tailor, send me bills and I'll never employ you more. However, needs must, when the devil drives: and for fear of "before and behind Mr. Honeycomb," I'll proceed. I have not time to elucidate the forms and shapes of the grass and trees; for, rot it! I forgot to bring my mathematical case with me, which unfortunately contained my triangular prisms; so

that the hues of the grass cannot be dissected for you.

For these last five or six days we have had regularly a boat on the Isis, and explored all the streams about, which are more in number than your eyelashes. We sometimes skim into a bed of rushes, and there become naturalized river-folks. There is one particularly nice nest, which we have christened "Reynolds' Cove," in which we have read Wordsworth and talked as may be.

* * * Failings I am always rather rejoiced to find in a man than sorry for; they bring us to a level. — has them, but then his makes-up are very good. — agrees with the northern poet in this, "He is not one of those who much delight to season their fireside with personal talk." I must confess, however, having a little itch that way, and at this present moment I have a few neighbourly remarks to make. The world, and especially our England, has, within the last thirty years, been vexed and teased by a set of devils, whom I detest so much that I almost hunger after an Acherontic promotion to a torturer, purposely for their accommodation. These devils are a set of women, who have taken a snack or luncheon of literary scraps, set themselves up for towers of Babel in languages, Sapphos in poetry, Euclids in geometry, and everything in nothing. The thing has made a very uncomfortable impression on me. I had longed for some real feminine modesty in these things, and was therefore gladdened in the extreme on opening, the other day, one of Bayley's books—a book of poetry written by one beautiful Mrs. Philips, a friend of

Jeremy Taylor's, and called "The Matchless Orinda." You must have heard of her, and most likely read her poetry — I wish you have not, that I may have the pleasure of treating you with a few stanzas. I do it at a venture. You will not regret reading them once more. The following, to her friend Mrs. M. A., at parting, you will judge of:

"I have examined and do find,
Of all that favour me,
There's none I grieve to leave behind,
But only, only thee:
To part with thee I needs must die,
Could parting sep'rate thee and I.

But neither chance nor compliment
Did element our love;
'Twas sacred sympathy was lent
Us from the Quire above.
That friendship Fortune did create
Still fears a wound from Time or Fate.

Our changed and mingled souls are grown
To such acquaintance now,
That, if each would resume her own,
Alas! we know not how,
We have each other so engrost
That each is in the union lost.

And thus we can no absence know,
Nor shall we be confined;
Our active souls will daily go
To learn each other's mind.
Nay, should we never meet to sense
Our souls would hold intelligence.

Inspired with a flame divine,
I scorn to court a stay;
For from that noble soul of thine

I ne'er can be away.
But I shall weep when thou dost grieve,
Nor can I die whilst thou dost live.

By my own temper I shall guess
At thy felicity,
And only like my happiness,
Because it pleaseth thee.
Our hearts at any time will tell
If thou or I be sick or well.

All honour sure I must pretend,
All that is good or great;
She that would be Rosannia's friend,
Must be at least compleat;¹
If I have any bravery,
'Tis 'cause I have so much of thee.

Thy lieger soul in me shall lie,
And all thy thoughts reveal,
Then back again with mine shall flie,
And thence to me shall steal,
Thus still to one another tend:
Such is the sacred name of friend.

Thus our twin souls in one shall grow,
And teach the world new love,
Redeem the age and sex, and show
A flame Fate dares not move:
And courting Death to be our friend,
Our lives together too shall end.

A dew shall dwell upon our tomb
Of such a quality,
That fighting armies thither come
Shall reconciled be.
We'll ask no epitaph, but say,
Orinda and Rosannia."

¹ "A compleat friend" — this line sounded very oddly to me at first.

In other of her poems there is a most delicate fancy of the Fletcher kind—which we will con over together.

So Haydon is in town. I had a letter from him yesterday. We will contrive as the winter comes on—but that is neither here nor there. Have you heard from Rice? Has Martin met with the Cumberland Beggar, or been wondering at the old Leech-gatherer? Has he a turn for fossils? that is, is he capable of sinking up to his middle in a morass? How is Hazlitt? We were reading his Table (Round Table) last night. I know he thinks himself not estimated by ten people in the world. I wish he knew he is. I am getting on famous with my third book—have written 800 lines thereof, and hope to finish it next week. Bailey likes what I have done very much. Believe me, my dear Reynolds, one of my chief layings-up is the pleasure I shall have in showing it to you, I may now say, in a few days.

I have heard twice from my brothers; they are going on very well and send their remembrances to you. We expected to have had notices from little Hampton this morning—we must wait till Tuesday. I am glad of their days with the Dilkes. You are, I know, very much teased in that precious London, and want all the rest possible; so [I] shall be contented with as brief a scrawl—a word or two, till there comes a pat hour.

Send us a few of your stanzas to read in “Reynolds’ Cove.” Give my love and respects to your mother, and remember me kindly to all at home.

Yours faithfully,

JOHN KEATS.

I have left the doublings for Bailey, who is going to say that he will write to you to-morrow.

No. 10.

FROM A LETTER TO HAYDON.

"You will be glad to hear that within these last three weeks I have written 1000 lines, which are the third book of my poem. My ideas of it, I assure you, are very low, and I would write the subject thoroughly again, but I am tired of it, and think the time would be better spent in writing a new romance, which I have in my eye for next summer. Rome was not built in a day, and all the good I expect from my employment this summer is the fruit of experience, which I hope to gather in my next poem.

Yours eternally,

"JOHN KEATS."

No. 11.^a

EXTRACT OF LETTER TO BAILEY.

"As to what you say about my being a poet, I can return no answer but by saying that the high idea I have of poetical fame makes me think I see it towering too high above me. At any rate, I have no right to talk until 'Endymion' is finished. It will be a test, a trial of my powers of imagination,

^a "I refused," he writes to Mr. Bailey, (Oct. 8th), "to visit Shelley, that I might have my own unfettered scope; and I propose to translate some reflections on his undertaking, which he says he wrote to his brother George in the spring, and which are well worth the time." As to what, etc. — *Henry John Keats*, p. 48.

and chiefly of my invention,—which is a rare thing indeed,—by which I must make 4000 lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with poetry. And when I consider that this is a great task, and that when done it will take me but a dozen paces towards the Temple of Fame, it makes me say, ‘God forbid that I should be without such a task!’ I have heard Hunt say, and [I] may be asked, ‘*Why endeavour after a long poem?*’ To which I should answer, ‘Do not the lovers of poetry like to have a little region to wander in, where they may pick and choose, and in which the images are so numerous that many are forgotten and found new in a second reading—which may be food for a week’s stroll in the summer?’ Do not they like this better than what they can read through before Mrs. Williams comes down-stairs?—a morning’s work at most.

“Besides, a long poem is a test of invention, which I take to be the polar star of poetry, as fancy is the sails, and imagination the rudder. Did our great poets ever write short pieces? I mean, in the shape of tales. This same invention seems indeed of late years to have been forgotten in a partial excellence. But enough of this; I put on no laurels till I shall have finished ‘Endymion,’ and I hope Apollo is not enraged at my having made mockery of him at Hunt’s.”

The conclusion of this letter has now a more melancholy meaning than it had when written. “The little mercury I have taken has corrected the poison and improved my health—though I

feel from my employment that I shall never again be secure in robustness. Would that you were as well as

“Your sincere friend and brother,
“JOHN KEATS.”

No. 12.

[Post-mark 22 Nov. 1817. LEATHERHEAD.]

MY DEAR BAILEY :

I will get over the first part of this (*unpaid*) letter as soon as possible, for it relates to the affairs of poor —. To a man of your nature, such a letter as —’s must have been extremely cutting. What occasions the greater part of the world’s quarrels? Simply this: two minds meet, and do not understand each other time enough to prevent any shock or surprise at the conduct of either party. As soon as I had known — three days, I had got enough of his character not to have been surprised at such a letter as he has hurt you with. Nor, when I knew it, was it a principle with me to drop his acquaintance; although with you it would have been an imperious feeling. I wish you knew all that I think about genius and the heart. And yet I think that you are thoroughly acquainted with my innermost breast in that respect, or you would not have known me even thus long and still hold me to be worthy to be your dear friend. In passing, however, I must say of one thing that has pressed upon me lately, and increased my humility and capability of

submission — and that is this truth : Men of genius are great as certain ethereal chemicals operating on the mass of neutral intellect ; but they have not any individuality, any determined character. I would call the top and head of those who have a proper self, men of power.

But I am running my head into a subject which I am certain I could not do justice to under five years' study and three vols. octavo ; and, moreover, [I] long to be talking about the imagination : so, my dear Bailey, do not think of this unpleasant affair, if possible do not — I defy any harm to come of it. I shall write to — this week and request him to tell me all his goings-on from time to time, by letter, wherever I may be. It will go on well — so don't, because you have discovered a coldness in —, suffer yourself to be teased. Do not, my dear fellow. O ! I wish I was as certain of the end of all your troubles as that of your momentary start about the authenticity of the imagination. I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of imagination. What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth, whether it existed before or not ; for I have the same idea of all our passions as of love ; they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential beauty. In a word, you may know my favourite speculation by my first book, and the little song I sent in my last, which is a representation from the fancy of the probable mode of operating in these matters. The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—he awoke and found it truth. I am more zealous in this affair because I have never

yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning, and yet [so] it must be. Can it be that even the greatest philosopher ever arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections? However it may be, O for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts! It is "a vision in the form of youth," a shadow of reality to come; and this consideration has further convinced me,—for it has come as auxiliary to another favourite speculation of mine,—that we shall enjoy ourselves hereafter by having what we call happiness on earth repeated in a finer tone. And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in sensation, rather than hunger, as you do after truth. Adam's dream will do here, and seems to be a conviction that imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human life and its spiritual repetition. But, as I was saying, the simple imaginative mind may have its rewards in the repetition of its own silent working coming continually on the spirit with a fine suddenness. To compare great things with small, have you never, by being surprised with an old melody, in a delicious place, by a delicious voice, *felt* over again your very speculations and surmises at the time it first operated on your soul? Do you not remember forming to yourself the singer's face—more beautiful than it was possible, and yet, with the elevation of the moment, you did not think so? Even then you were mounted on the wings of imagination, so high that the prototype must be hereafter—that delicious face you will see. Sure this cannot be exactly the case with a complex mind—one that is imagina-

tive, and at the same time careful of its fruits—who would exist partly on sensation, partly on thought—to whom it is necessary that “years should bring the philosophic mind”? Such a one I consider yours, and therefore it is necessary to your eternal happiness that you not only drink this old wine of heaven, which I shall call the re-digestion of our most ethereal musings upon earth, but also increase in knowledge, and know all things.

I am glad to hear that you are in a fair way for Easter. You will soon get through your unpleasant reading, and then!—but the world is full of troubles, and I have not much reason to think myself pestered with many.

I think —— or —— has a better opinion of me than I deserve; for, really and truly, I do not think my brother's illness connected with mine. You know more of the real cause than they do; nor have I any chance of being rack'd as you have been. You perhaps, at one time, thought there was such a thing as worldly happiness to be arrived at, at certain periods of time marked out. You have of necessity, from your disposition, been thus led away. I scarcely remember counting upon any happiness. I look not for it if it be not in the present hour. Nothing startles me beyond the moment. The setting sun will always set me to rights, or if a sparrow were before my window, I take part in its existence, and pick about the gravel. The first thing that strikes me on hearing a misfortune having befallen another is this: “Well, it cannot be helped: he will have the pleasure of trying the resources of his spirit”; and I beg now, my dear

Bailey, that hereafter, should you observe anything cold in me, not to put it to the account of heartlessness, but abstraction; for I assure you I sometimes feel not the influence of a passion or affection during a whole week; and so long this sometimes continues, I begin to suspect myself, and the genuineness of my feelings at other times, thinking them a few barren tragedy-tears.

My brother Tom is much improved; he is going to Devonshire, whither I shall follow him. At present, I am just arrived at Dorking, to change the scene, change the air, and give me a spur to wind up my poem, of which there are wanting 500 lines. I should have been here a day sooner, but the Reynoldses persuaded me to stop in town to meet your friend Christie. There were Rice and Martin. We talked about ghosts. I will have some talk with Taylor, and let you know when, please God, I come down at Christmas. I will find the "Examiner," if possible. My best regards to Gleig, my brothers, to you, and Mrs. Bentley.

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

I want to say much more to you—a few hints will set one going.

No. 13.

LEATHERHEAD, 22nd November, 1817.

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:

There are two things which tease me here—one of them —, and the other that I cannot go with

Tom into Devonshire. However, I hope to do my duty to myself in a week or so; and then I'll try what I can do for my neighbour. Now, is not this virtuous? On returning to town I'll damn all idleness—indeed, in superabundance of employment, I must not be content to run here and there on little two-penny errands, but turn Rake-hell, *i. e.*, go a masking, or Bailey will think me just as great a promise-keeper as *he* thinks you; for myself I do not, and do not remember above one complaint against you for matter o' that. Bailey writes so abominable a hand, to give his letter a fair reading requires a little time; so I had not seen, when I saw you last, his invitation to Oxford at Christmas. I'll go with you. You know how poorly — was. I do not think it was all corporeal,—bodily pain was not used to keep him silent. I'll tell you what; he was hurt at what your sisters said about his joking with your mother. It will all blow over. God knows, my dear Reynolds, I should not talk any sorrow to you—you must have enough vexation, so I won't say more. If I ever start a rueful subject in a letter to you—blow me! Why don't you? Now I was going to ask you a very silly question, [which] neither you nor anybody else could answer, under a folio, or at least a pamphlet—you shall judge. Why don't you, as I do, look unconcerned at what may be called more particularly heart-vexations? They never surprise me. Lord! a man should have the fine point of his soul taken off to become fit for this world.

I like this place very much. There is hill and dale, and a little river. I went up Box Hill this

evening after the moon,—“you a’ seen the moon,”—came down, and wrote some lines. Whenever I am separated from you, and not engaged in a continued poem, every letter shall bring you a lyric—but I am too anxious for you to enjoy the whole to send you a particle. One of the three books I have with me is “Shakspeare’s Poems”: I never found so many beauties in the sonnets; they seem to be full of fine things said unintentionally—in the intensity of working out conceits. Is this to be borne? Hark ye!

“When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,
Which erst from heat did canopy the head,
And Summer’s green all girded up in sheaves,
Borne on the bier with white and bristly head.”

He has left nothing to say about nothing or anything: for look at snails—you know what he says about snails—you know when he talks about “cockled snails.” Well, in one of these sonnets, he says—the chap slips into—no! I lie! this is in the “Venus and Adonis”; the simile brought it to my mind.

“As the snail, whose tender horns being hit,
Shrinks back into his shelly cave with pain,
And there all smothered up in shade doth sit,
Long after fearing to put forth again;
So at his bloody view her eyes are fled,
Into the deep dark cabins of her head.”

He overwhelms a genuine lover of poetry with all manner of abuse, talking about

“A poet’s rage
And stretched metre of an antique song.”

Which, by the by, will be a capital motto for my poem, won't it? He speaks, too, of "Time's antique pen"—and "April's first-born flowers"—and "Death's eternal cold." By the Whim-King! I'll give you a stanza, because it is not material in connection, and when I wrote it I wanted you to give your vote pro or con.

Chrystalline Brother of the belt of Heaven,
 Aquarius! to whom King Jove hath given
 Two liquid pulse-streams, 'stead of feather'd wings—
 Two fan-like fountains—thine illuminings
 For Dian play:
 Dissolve the frozen purity of air;
 Let thy white shoulders, silvery and bare,
 Show cold through wat'ry pinions: make more bright
 The Star-Queen's crescent on her marriage-night:
 Haste, haste away!

I see there is an advertisement in the "Chronicle" to poets—he is so overloaded with poems on the "late princess." I suppose you do not lack—send me a few—lend me thy hand to laugh a little—send me a little pullet-sperm, a few finch-eggs—and remember me to each of our card-playing club. When you die you will all be turned into dice, and be put in pawn with the devil: for cards, they crumple up like anything.

I rest,

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

Give my love to both houses—*hinc atque illinc*.

No. 14.

Jan. 23, 1818.

MY DEAR TAYLOR:

I have spoke to Haydon about the drawing. He would do it with all his art and heart, too, if so I will it; however, he has written this to me; but I must tell you first he intends painting a finished picture from the poem. Thus he writes: "When I do anything for your poem it must be effectual—an honour to both of us; to hurry up a sketch for the season won't do. I think an engraving from your head, from a chalk drawing of mine, done with all my might, to which I would put my name, would answer Taylor's idea better than the other. Indeed, I am sure of it."

* * * What think you of this? Let me hear. I shall have my second book in readiness forthwith.

Yours most sincerely,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 15.

Jan. 23, 1818.

MY DEAR BAILEY:

Twelve days have passed since your last reached me. What has gone through the myriads of human minds since the 12th? We talk of the immense number of books, the volumes ranged thousands by thousands; but perhaps more goes through the human intelligence in twelve days than ever was

written. *How has that unfortunate family lived through the twelve?* One saying of yours I shall never forget: you may not recollect it, it being, perhaps, said when you were looking on the surface and seeming of humanity alone, without a thought of the past or the future, or the deeps of good and evil. You were at that moment estranged from speculation, and I think you have arguments ready for the man who would utter it to you. This is a formidable preface for a simple thing—merely you said, “Why should woman suffer?” Aye, why should she? “By heavens, I’d coin my very soul, and drop my blood for drachmas!” These things are, and he who feels how incompetent the most skyey knight-errantry is to heal this bruised fairness, is like a sensitive leaf on the hot hand of thought.

Your tearing, my dear friend, a spiritless and gloomy letter up to re-write to me, is what I shall never forget—it was to me a real thing.

Things have happened lately of great perplexity; you must have heard of them; — and — retorting and recriminating, and parting for ever. The same thing has happened between — and —. It is unfortunate: men should bear with each other; there lives not the man who may not be cut up, aye, lashed to pieces, on his weakest side. The best of men have but a portion of good in them—a kind of spiritual yeast in their frames, which creates the ferment of existence—by which a man is propelled to act, and strive, and buffet with circumstance. The sure way, Bailey, is first to know a

man's faults, and then be passive. If, after that, he insensibly draws you towards him, then you have no power to break the link. Before I felt interested in either — or —, I was well-read in their faults; yet, knowing them, I have been cementing gradually with both. I have an affection for them both, for reasons almost opposite; and to both must I of necessity cling, supported always by the hope that when a little time, a few years, shall have tried me more fully in their esteem, I may be able to bring them together. The time must come, because they have both hearts; and they will recollect the best parts of each other when this gust is overblown.

I had a message from you through a letter to Jane, I think, about C—. There can be no idea of binding until a sufficient sum is sure for him; and even then the thing should be maturely considered by all his helpers. I shall try my luck upon as many fat purses as I can meet with. C— is improving very fast: I have the greater hopes of him because he is so slow in development. A man of great executing powers at twenty, with a look and a speech the most stupid, is sure to do something.

I have just looked through the second side of your letter. I feel a great content at it.

I was at Hunt's the other day, and he surprised me with a real authenticated lock of *Milton's hair*. I know you would like what I wrote thereon, so here it is—as they say of a sheep in a nursery book:

Chief of organic numbers!
Old Scholar of the Spheres!
Thy spirit never slumbers,
But rolls about our ears
For ever and for ever!
O what a mad endeavour
Worketh he,
Who to thy sacred and ennobled hearse
Would offer a burnt sacrifice of verse
And melody.

Lend thine ear
To a young Delian oath—aye, by thy soul,
By all that from thy mortal lips did roll,
And by the kernel of thy earthly love,
Beauty in things on earth and things above,
I swear!

For many years my offerings must be hushed;
When I do speak, I'll think upon this hour,

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Because I feel my forehead hot and flushed,
Even at the simplest vassal of thy power.
A lock of thy bright hair,—
Sudden it came,
And I was startled when I caught thy name
Coupled so unaware;
Yet at the moment temperate was my blood—
I thought I had beheld it from the flood!

This I did at Hunt's at his request. Perhaps I should have done something better alone and at home.

I have sent my first book to the press and this afternoon shall begin preparing the second. My visit to you will be a great spur to quicken the proceeding. I have not had your sermon returned. I long to make it the subject of a letter to you. What do they say at Oxford?

I trust you and Gleig pass much fine time together. Remember me to him and Whitehead. My brother Tom is getting stronger, but his spitting of blood continues.

I sat down to read "King Lear" yesterday, and felt the greatness of the thing up to the writing of a sonnet preparatory thereto: in my next you shall have it.

There was some miserable reports of Rice's health. I went, and lo! Master Jemmy had been to the play the night before, and was out at the time. He always comes on his legs like a cat.

I have seen a good deal of Wordsworth. Hazlitt is lecturing on poetry at the Surrey Institution. I shall be there next Tuesday.

Your most affectionate friend,
JOHN KEATS.

No. 16.

FROM A LETTER TO MR. REYNOLDS.

HAMPSTEAD, Jan. 31st, 1818.

Now I purposed to write to you a serious poetical letter, but I find that a maxim I met with the other day is a just one: "On cause m'ieux quand on ne dit pas *causons*." I was hindered, however, from my first intention by a mere muslin handkerchief, very neatly pinned — but "Hence, vain deluding," &c. Yet I cannot write in prose; it is a sunshiny day and I cannot, so here goes:

Hence Burgundy, Claret, and Port,
Away with old Hock and Madeira,
Too earthly ye are for my sport;
There's a beverage brighter and clearer
Instead of a pitiful rummer,
My wine overbrims a whole summer;
My bowl is the sky,
And I drink at my eye,
Till I feel in the brain
A Delphian pain—
Then follow, my Caius! then follow:
On the green of the hill
We will drink our fill
Of golden sunshine
Till our brains intertwine
With the glory and grace of Apollo!

God of the Meridian,
And of the East and West,
To thee my soul is flown,
And my body is earthward press'd.

It is an awful mission,
A terrible division;
And leaves a gulf austere
To be fill'd with worldly fear.
Aye, when the soul is fled
To high above our head,
Affrighted do we gaze
After its airy maze,
As doth a mother wild,
When her young infant child
Is in an eagle's claws —
And is not this the cause
Of madness? — God of Song,
Thou bearest me along
Through sights I scarce can bear:
O let me, let me share
With the hot lyre and thee,
The staid Philosophy.
Temper my lonely hours,
And let me see thy bow'rs
More unalarm'd!

My dear Reynolds, you must forgive all this ranting; but the fact is, I cannot write sense this morning; however, you shall have some. I will copy out my last sonnet.

When I have fears that I may cease to be, &c.*

I must take a turn, and then write to Teignmouth. Remember me to all, not excepting yourself.

Your sincere friend,

JOHN KEATS.

* See the Poems.

No. 17.

HAMPSTEAD, Feb. 3, 1818.

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:

I thank you for your dish of filberts. Would I could get a basket of them by way of dessert every day for the sum of two-pence (two sonnets on Robin Hood sent by the two-penny post). Would we were a sort of ethereal pigs, and turned loose to feed upon spiritual mast and acorns! which would be merely being a squirrel and feeding upon filberts; for what is a squirrel but an airy pig, or a filbert but a sort of archangelical acorn? About the nuts being worth cracking, all I can say is, that where there are a throng of delightful images ready drawn, simplicity is the only thing. It may be said that we ought to read our contemporaries, that Wordsworth, &c., should have their due from us. But, for the sake of a few fine imaginative or domestic passages, are we to be bullied into a certain philosophy engendered in the whims of an egotist? Every man has his speculations, but every man does not brood and peacock over them till he makes a false coinage and deceives himself. Many a man can travel to the very bourne of Heaven, and yet want confidence to put down his half-seeing. Sancho will invent a journey heavenward as well as anybody. We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us, and, if we do not agree, seems to put its hand into its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it

or amaze it with itself, but with its subject. How beautiful are the retired flowers! How would they lose their beauty were they to throng into the highway, crying out, "Admire me, I am a violet! Dote upon me, I am a primrose!" Modern poets differ from the Elizabethans in this: each of the moderns, like an elector of Hanover, governs his petty state, and knows how many straws are swept daily from the causeways in all his dominions, and has a continual itching that all the housewives should have their coppers well scoured. The ancients were emperors of vast provinces; they had only heard of the remote ones, and scarcely cared to visit them. I will cut all this. I will have no more of Wordsworth or Hunt in particular. Why should we be of the tribe of Manasseh when we can wander with Esau? Why should we kick against the pricks when we can walk on roses? Why should we be owls when we can be eagles? Why be teased with "nice-eyed wagtails" when we have in sight "the cherub contemplation"? Why with Wordsworth's "Matthew, with a bough of wilding in his hand," when we can have Jacques "under an oak," &c.? The secret of the "bough of wilding" will run through your head faster than I can write it. Old Matthew spoke to him some years ago on some nothing, and because he happens in an evening walk to imagine the figure of the old man, he must stamp it down in black and white, and it is henceforth sacred. I don't mean to deny Wordsworth's grandeur and Hunt's merit, but I mean to say we need not be teased with grandeur and merit when we can have them uncon-

taminated and unobtrusive. Let us have the old poets and Robin Hood. Your letter and its sonnets gave me more pleasure than will the fourth book of "Childe Harold" and the whole of anybody's life and opinions.

In return for your dish of filberts, I have gathered a few catkins.* I hope they'll look pretty.

No, those days are gone away, &c.

I hope you will like them; they are at least written in the spirit of outlawry. Here are the mermaid lines:

Souls of poets dead and gone, &c.

In the hope that these scribblings will be some amusement for you this evening, I remain, copying on the hill,

Your sincere friend and co-scribbler,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 18.

[Post-mark, HAMPSTEAD. Feb. 19, 1818.]

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:

I had an idea that a man might pass a very pleasant life in this manner: Let him on a certain day read a certain page of full poesy or distilled

* Mr. Reynolds had inclosed Hood, to which these fine Keats some sonnets on Robin lines are an answer.

prose, and let him wander with it, and muse upon it, and reflect upon it, and bring home to it, and prophesy upon it, and dream upon it, until it becomes stale. But will it do so? Never. When man has arrived at a certain ripeness of intellect, any one grand and spiritual passage serves him as a starting-post towards all "the two-and-thirty palaces." How happy is such a voyage of conception, what delicious diligent indolence! A doze upon a sofa does not hinder it, and a nap upon clover engenders ethereal finger-pointings; the prattle of a child gives it wings, and the converse of middle age a strength to beat them; a strain of music conducts to "an odd angle of the Isle," and when the leaves whisper it puts a girdle round the earth. Nor will this sparing touch of noble books be any irreverence to their writers; for perhaps the honours paid by man are trifles in comparison to the benefit done by great works to the "spirit and pulse of good" by their mere passive existence." Memory should not be called knowledge. Many have original minds who do not think it; they are led away by custom. Now it appears to me that almost any man may, like the spider, spin from his own inwards his own airy citadel. The points of leaves and twigs on which the spider begins her work are few, and she fills the air with a beautiful circuiting. Man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine web of his soul, and weave a tapestry empyrean — full of symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wanderings, of distinctness for his luxury. But the minds of mortals are so different, and bent on such

diverse journeys, that it may at first appear impossible for any common taste and fellowship to exist between two or three under these suppositions. It is, however, quite the contrary. Minds would leave each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in numberless points, and at last greet each other at the journey's end. An old man and a child would talk together, and the old man be led on his path and the child left thinking. Man should not dispute or assert, but whisper results to his neighbour, and thus by every germ of spirit sucking the sap from mould ethereal, every human [being] might become great, and humanity, instead of being a wide heath of furze and briers, with here and there a remote oak or pine, would become a grand democracy of forest trees ! It has been an old comparison for our urging on — the bee-hive ; however, it seems to me that we should rather be the flower than the bee. For it is a false notion that more is gained by receiving than giving — no, the receiver and the giver are equal in their benefits. The flower, I doubt not, receives a fair guerdon from the bee. Its leaves blush deeper in the next spring. And who shall say, between man and woman, which is the most delighted ? Now it is more noble to sit like Jove than to fly like Mercury ; let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey, bee-like buzzing here and there for a knowledge of what is to be arrived at ; but let us open our leaves like a flower, and be passive and receptive, budding patiently under the eye of Apollo, and taking hints from every noble insect that favours us with a visit. Sap will be given us for meat and dew for drink.

I was led into these thoughts, my dear Reynolds, by the beauty of the morning operating on a sense of idleness. I have not read any books—the morning said I was right—I had no idea but of the morning, and the thrush said I was right—seeming to say :

O thou! whose face hath felt the Winter's wind,
Whose eye hath seen the snow-clouds hung in mist,
And the black elm-tops among the freezing stars;
To thee the Spring will be a harvest time.
O thou! whose only book hath been the light
Of supreme darkness which thou feddest on
Night after night when Phœbus was away,
To thee the Spring will be a triple morn.
O fret not after knowledge!—I have none,
And yet my song comes native with the warmth,
O fret not after knowledge!—I have none,
And yet the evening listens. He who saddens
At thought of idleness cannot be idle,
And he's awake who thinks himself asleep.

Now I am sensible that this is a mere sophistication (however it may neighbour to any truths) to excuse my own indulgence. So I will not deceive myself that man should be equal to Jove, but think himself very well off as a sort of scullion-Mercury, or even a humble-bee. It is no matter whether I am right or wrong, either one way or another, if there is sufficient to lift a little time from your shoulders.

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 19.

[Post-mark, 30 Jan. 1818. HAMPSTEAD.]

MY DEAR TAYLOR:

These lines, as they now stand, about "happiness," have rung in my ears like "a chime a mending." See here:

Behold

Wherein lies happiness, Peona? fold, &c.

It appears to me the very contrary of "blessed."
I hope this will appear to you more eligible:

Wherein lies happiness? In that which becks
Our ready minds to fellowship divine;
A fellowship with essence, till we shine
Full alchemized and free of space. Behold
The clear religion of Heaven — Peona! fold, &c.

You must indulge me by putting this in; for, setting aside the badness of the other, such a preface is necessary to the subject. The whole thing must, I think, have appeared to you, who are a consecutive man, as a thing almost of mere words. But I assure you that, when I wrote it, it was a regular stepping of the imagination towards a truth. My having written that argument will perhaps be of the greatest service to me of anything I ever did. It sets before me the gradations of happiness, even like a kind of pleasure thermometer, and is my first

step towards the chief attempt in the drama: the playing of different natures with joy and sorrow.

Do me this favour, and believe me,

Your sincere friend,

J. KEATS.

I hope your next work will be of a more general interest. I suppose you cogitate a little about it now and then.

No. 20.

HAMPSTEAD, Feb. 27, 1818.

MY DEAR TAYLOR:

Your alteration strikes me as being a great improvement. And now I will attend to the punctuation you speak of. The comma should be at *soberly*, and in the other passage the comma should follow *quiet*. I am extremely indebted to you for this alteration and also for your after admonitions. It is a sorry thing for me that any one should have to overcome prejudices in reading my verses. That affects me more than any hypercriticism on any particular passage. In "Endymion," I have most likely but moved into the go-cart from the leading strings. In poetry I have a few axioms, and you will see how far I am from their centre.

1st. I think poetry should surprise by a fine excess, and not by singularity; it should strike the

reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a remembrance.

2nd. Its touches of beauty should never be half-way, thereby making the reader breathless, instead of content. The rise, the progress, the setting of imagery, should, like the sun, come natural to him, shine over him, and set soberly, although in magnificence, leaving him in the luxury of twilight. But it is easier to think what poetry should be than to write it. And this leads me to

Another axiom—That if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all. However it may be with me, I cannot help looking into new countries with “Oh, for a muse of fire to ascend!” If “Endymion” serves me as a pioneer, perhaps I ought to be content, for, thank God, I can read, and perhaps understand, Shakspeare to his depths; and I have, I am sure, many friends, who, if I fail, will attribute any change in my life and temper to humbleness rather than pride—to a cowering under the wings of great poets, rather than to a bitterness that I am not appreciated. I am anxious to get “Endymion” printed that I may forget it and proceed. I have copied the third book and begun the fourth. I will take care the printer shall not trip up my heels.

Remember me to Percy Street.

Your sincere and obliged friend,

JOHN KEATS.

P. S.—You shall have a short preface in good time.

No. 21.

TEIGNMOUTH, 14 March [1818].

DEAR REYNOLDS :

I escaped being blown over, and blown under, and trees and house being toppled on me. I have, since hearing of Brown's accident, had an aversion to a dose of parapet, and being also a lover of antiquities, I would sooner have a harmless piece of Herculaneum sent me quietly as a present than ever so modern a chimney-pot tumbled on to my head. Being agog to see some Devonshire, I would have taken a walk the first day, but the rain would not let me ; and the second, but the rain would not let me ; and the third, but the rain forbade it. Ditto fourth, ditto fifth, ditto—so I made up my mind to stop in doors, and catch a sight flying between the showers : and, behold, I saw a pretty valley, pretty cliffs, pretty brooks, pretty meadows, pretty trees, both standing as they were created, and blown down as they were uncreated. The green is beautiful, as they say, and pity it is that it is amphibious—*mais* ! but, alas ! the flowers here wait as naturally for the rain twice a day as the muscles do for the tide ; so we look upon a brook in these parts as you look upon a splash in your country. There must be something to support this—aye, fog, hail, snow, rain, mist, blanketing up three parts of the year. This Devonshire is like Lydia Languish, very entertaining when it smiles, but cursedly subject to sympathetic

móisture. You have the sensation of walking under one great lamp-lighter, and you can't go on the other side of the ladder to keep your frock clean. Buy a girdle, put a pebble in your mouth, loosen your braces, for I am going among scenery whence I intend to tip you the Damosel Radcliffe. I'll cavern you, and grotto you, and water-fall you, and wood you, and water you, and immense-rock you, and tremendous-sound you, and solitude you. I'll make a lodgement on your glaci's by a row of pines, and storm your covered way with bramble-bushes. I'll have at you with hip-and-haw small-shot, and cannonade you with shingles. I'll be witty upon salt fish and impede your cavalry with clotted-cream. But, ah! coward! to talk at this rate to a sick man, or, I hope, to one that was sick—for I hope by this you stand on your right foot. If you are not—that's all—I intend to cut all sick people if they do not make up their minds to cut sickness—a fellow to whom I have a complete aversion, and who, strange to say, is harboured and countenanced in several houses where I visit: he is sitting now, quite impudent, between me and Tom; he insults me at poor Jem Rice's; and you have seated him before now between us at the theatre, when I thought he looked with a longing eye at poor Kean. I shall say, once for all, to my friends, generally and severally, cut that fellow, or I cut you.

I went to the theatre here the other night, which I forgot to tell George, and got insulted, which I ought to remember to forget to tell anybody; for I did not fight, and as yet have had no redress—

“Lie thou there, sweetheart!” I wrote to Bailey yesterday, obliged to speak in a high way, and a damme, who’s afraid? for I had owed him [a letter] so long; however, he shall see I will be better in future. Is he in town yet? I have directed to Oxford as the better chance.

I have copied my fourth book and shall write the preface soon. I wish it was all done; for I want to forget it and make my mind free for something new. Atkins, the coachman, Bartlett, the surgeon, Simmons, the barber, and the girls over at the bonnet shop say we shall now have a month of seasonable weather — warm, witty, and full of invention.

Write to me, and tell me that you are well or thereabouts; or, by the holy Beaucœur, which I suppose is the Virgin Mary or the repented Magdalen (beautiful name, that Magdalen), I’ll take to my wings and fly away to anywhere but old or Nova Scotia.

I wish I had a little bit of innocent metaphysic in my head to criss-cross the letter: but you know a favourite tune is hardest to be remembered when one wants it most; and you, I know, have long ere this taken it for granted that I never have any speculations without associating you in them, where they are of a pleasant nature; and you know enough of me to tell the places where I haunt most, so that if you think for five minutes after having read this, you will find it a long letter, and see written in the air before you,

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

TEIGNMOUTH, 25 March, 1818.

In hopes of cheering you through a minute or two, I was determined, will he nill he, to send you some lines, so you will excuse the unconnected subjects and careless verse. You know, I am sure, Leland's "Enchanted Castle," and I wish you may be pleased with my remembrance of it. The rain is come on again. I think with me Devonshire stands a very poor chance. I shall damn it up hill and down dale, if it keep up to the average of six fine days in three weeks. Let me hear better news of you.

Dear Reynolds! as last night I lay in bed,
There came before my eyes that wonted thread
Of shapes, and shadows, and remembrances,
That every other minute vex and please :
Things all disjointed come from north and south,—
Two Witch's eyes above a Cherub's mouth,
Voltaire with casque and shield and habergeon,
And Alexander with his night-cap on ;
Old Socrates a tying his cravat,
And Hazlitt playing with Miss Edgeworth's cat ;
And Junius Brutus, pretty well, so so,
Making the best of's way towards Soho.

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But flowers bursting out with lusty pride,
And young Æolian hearts personified;
Some Titian colours touch'd into real life —
The sacrifice goes on; the pontiff knife
Gleams in the Sun, the milk-white heifer lows,
The pipes go shrilly, the libation flows:
A white sail shows above the green-head cliff,
Moves round the point, and throws her anchor stiff;
The mariners join hymn with those on land.

You know the enchanted Castle,—it doth stand
Upon a rock, on the border of a lake,
Nested in trees, which all do seem to shake
From some old magic-like Urganda's Sword.
O Phoebus! that I had thy sacred word
To show this Castle, in fair dreaming wise,
Unto my friend, while sick and ill he lies!

You know it well enough, where it doth seem
A mossy place, a Merlin's Hall, a dream;
You know the clear Lake, and the little Isles,
The mountains blue, and cold near neighbour rills,
All which elsewhere are but half animate;
There do they look alive to love and hate,
To smiles and frowns; they seem a lifted mound
Above some giant, pulsing underground.

Part of the Building was a chosen See,
Built by a banished Santon of Chaldee;
The other part, two thousand years from him,
Was built by Cuthbert de Saint Aldebrim;
Then there's a little wing, far from the Sun,
Built by a Lapland Witch turn'd maudlin Nun;
And many other juts of aged stone
Founded with many a mason-devil's groan.

The doors all look as if they oped themselves,
The windows as if latched by Fays and Elves,
And from them comes a silver flash of light,
As from the westward of a summer's night;

Or like a beauteous woman's large blue eyes
Gone mad thro' olden songs and poesies.

See! what is coming from the distance dim!
A golden Galley all in silken trim!
Three rows of oars are lightening, moment whiles,
Into the verd'rous bosoms of those isles;
Towards the shade, under the Castle wall,
It comes in silence,—now 'tis hidden all.
The Clarion sounds, and from a Postern-gate
An echo of sweet music doth create
A fear in the poor Herdsman, who doth bring
His beasts to trouble the enchanted spring,—
He tells of the sweet music, and the spot,
To all his friends, and they believe him not.

O, that our dreamings all, of sleep or wake,
Would all their colours from the sunset take
From something of material sublime,
Rather than shadow our own soul's day-time
In the dark void of night. For in the world
We jostle,—but my flag is not unfurl'd
On the Admiral-staff,—and so philosophize
I dare not yet! Oh, never will the prize,
High reason, and the love of good and ill,
Be my award! Things cannot to the will
Be settled, but they tease us out of thought;
Or is it that imagination brought
Beyond its proper bound, yet still confin'd,
Lost in a sort of Purgatory blind,
Cannot refer to any standard law
Of either earth or heaven? It is a flaw
In happiness, to see beyond our bourn,—
It forces us in summer skies to mourn,
It spoils the singing of the Nightingale.

Dear Reynolds! I have a mysterious tale,
And cannot speak it: the first page I read
Upon a Lampit rock of green sea-weed
Among the breakers; 'twas a quiet eve,

The rocks were silent, the wide sea did wave
 An untumultuous fringe of silver foam
 Along the flat brown sand; I was at home
 And should have been most happy,—but I saw
 Too far into the sea, where every man
 The greater on the less feeds evermore,—
 But I saw too distinct into the core
 Of an eternal fierce destruction,
 And so from happiness I far was gone.
 Still am I sick of it, and tho', to-day,
 I've gathered young spring-leaves and flowers gay
 Of periwinkle and wild strawberry,
 Still do I that most fierce destruction see,—
 The Shark at savage prey,—the Hawk at pounce,—
 The gentle Robin, like a Pard or Ounce,
 Ravening a Worm,—Away, ye horrid moods!
 Moods of one's mind! You know I hate them well,
 You know I'd sooner be a clapping Bell
 To some Kamtchatcan Missionary Church,
 Than with these horrid moods be left i' the lurch.

No. 23.

TEIGNMOUTH, 25 March, 1818.

MY DEAR RICE:

Being in the midst of your favourite Devon, I should not, by right, pen one word but it should contain a vast portion of wit, wisdom, and learning; for I have heard that Milton, ere he wrote his answer to Salmasius, came into these parts, and for one whole month rolled himself, for three whole hours a day, in a certain meadow hard by us, where the mark of his nose at equidistances is still

shown. The exhibitor of the said meadow further saith that, after these rollings, not a nettle sprang up in all the seven acres for seven years, and that from the said time a new sort of plant was made from the whitethorn, of a thornless nature, very much used by the bucks of the present day to rap their boots withal. This account made me very naturally suppose that the nettles and thorns, etherealized by the scholar's rotatory motion, and garnered in his head, thence flew, after a process of fermentation, against the luckless Salmasius, and occasioned his well-known and unhappy end. What a happy thing it would be if we could settle our thoughts and make our minds up on any matter in five minutes, and remain content; that is, build a sort of mental cottage of feelings, quiet and pleasant,—to have a sort of philosophical back-garden, and cheerful, holiday-keeping front one. But, alas! this never can be; for as the material cottager knows there are such places as France and Italy, and the Andes, and burning mountains, so the spiritual cottager has knowledge of the terra semincognita of things unearthly, and cannot for his life keep in the check-rein—or I should stop here, quiet and comfortable in my theory of—nettles. You will see, however, I am obliged to run wild, being attracted by the lode-stone concatenation. No sooner had I settled the knotty point of Salmasius than the devil put this whim into my head in the likeness of one of Pythagoras's questionings—Did Milton do more good or harm in the world? He wrote, let me inform you (for I have it from a friend who had it of —), he wrote "Lycidas,"

"Comus," "Paradise Lost," and other poems, with much delectable prose; he was, moreover, an active friend to man all his life, and has been since his death. Very good. But, my dear fellow, I must let you know that, as there is ever the same quantity of matter constituting this habitable globe; as the ocean, notwithstanding the enormous changes and revolutions taking place in some or other of its demesnes, notwithstanding waterspouts, whirlpools, and mighty rivers emptying themselves into it, it still is made up of the same bulk, nor ever varies the number of its atoms; and, as a certain bulk of water was instituted at the creation, so, very likely, a certain portion of intellect was spun forth into the thin air for the brains of man to prey upon it. You will see my drift without any unnecessary parenthesis. That which is contained in the Pacific could not be in the hollow of the Caspian; that which was in Milton's head could not find room in Charles the Second's. He, like a moon, attracted intellect to its flow—it has not ebbed yet, but has left the shore-pebbles all bare—I mean all bucks, authors of Hengist, and Castlereaghs of the present day, who, without Milton's gormandizing, might have been all wise men. Now, for as much as I was very predisposed to a country I had heard you speak so highly of, I took particular notice of everything during my journey, and have bought some nice folio asses' skins for memorandums. I have seen everything but the wind—and that, they say, becomes visible by taking a dose of acorns, or sleeping one night in a hog-trough, with your tail to the sow-sow-west.

I went yesterday to Dawlish fair—

“Over the Hill and over the Dale,
And over the Bourne to Dawlish,
Where ginger-bread wives have a scanty sale,
And ginger-bread nuts are smallish,” etc., etc.

Your sincere friend,
JOHN KEATS.

No. 24.

TEIGNMOUTH, April 9th, 1818.

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:

Since you all agree that the thing is bad,^{*} it must be so — though I am not aware that there is anything like Hunt in it (and if there is, it is my natural way, and I have something in common with Hunt.) Look over it again, and examine into the motives, the seeds, from which every one sentence sprang.

I have not the slightest feeling of humility towards the public, or to anything in existence but the Eternal Being, the principle of beauty, and the memory of great men. When I am writing for myself, for the mere sake of the moment's enjoyment, perhaps nature had its course with me; but a preface is written to the public—a thing I cannot help looking upon as an enemy, and which I cannot address without feelings of hostility. If I write a preface in a supple or subdued style, it will not be in character with me as a public speaker.

^{*} This is an allusion to the which was discarded for the first preface to “Endymion,” admirable one published.

I would be subdued before my friends, and thank them for subduing me; but among multitudes of men I have no feel of stooping; I hate the idea of humility to them.

I never wrote one single line of poetry with the least shadow of public thought.

Forgive me for vexing you and making a Trojan horse of such a trifle, both with respect to the matter in question, and myself; but it eases me to tell you: I could not live without the love of my friends; I would jump down *Ætna* for any great public good—but I hate a mawkish popularity. I cannot be subdued before them. My glory would be to daunt and dazzle the thousand jabberers about pictures and books. I see swarms of porcupines with their quills erect “like lime-twigs set to catch my winged book,” and I would fright them away with a touch. You will say my preface is not much of a touch. It would have been too insulting “to begin from *Jove*,” and I could not [set] a golden head upon a thing of clay. If there is any fault in the preface it is not affectation, but an undersong of disrespect to the public. If I write another preface it must be done without a thought of those people. I will think about it. If it should not reach you in four or five days, tell Taylor to publish it without a preface, and let the dedication simply stand—“Inscribed to the memory of Thomas Chatterton.”

I had resolved last night to write to you this morning—I wish it had been about something else—something to greet you towards the close of your long illness. I have had one or two intima-

tions of your going to Hampstead for a space ; and I regret to see your confounded rheumatism keeps you in Little Britain, where I am sure the air is too confined.

Devonshire continues rainy. As the drops beat against my window, they give me the same sensation as a quart of cold water offered to revive a half-drowned devil—no feel of the clouds dropping fatness ; but as if the roots of the earth were rotten, cold, and drenched. I have not been able to go to Kent's ca[ve?] at Babbicomb ; however, on one very beautiful day I had a fine clamber over the rocks all along as far as that place.

I shall be in town in about ten days. We go by way of Bath on purpose to call on Bailey. I hope soon to be writing to you about the things of the north, purposing to wayfare all over those parts. I have settled my accoutrements in my own mind, and will go to gorge wonders. However, we'll have some days together before I set out.

I have many reasons for going wonder-ways ; to make my winter chair free from spleen ; to enlarge my vision ; to escape disquisitions on poetry, and Kingston-criticism ; to promote digestion and economize shoe-leather. I'll have leather buttons and belt ; and, if Brown holds his mind, "over the hills we go." If my books will keep me to it, then will I take all Europe in turn, and see the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them. Tom is getting better : he hopes you may meet him at the top of the hill. My love to your nurse.

I am ever your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 25.

TEIGNMOUTH, April 10, 1818.

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:

I am anxious you should find this preface tolerable. If there is an affectation in it 'tis natural to me. Do let the printer's devil cook it, and let me be as "the casing air."

You are too good in this matter; were I in your state, I am certain I should have no thought but of discontent and illness. I might, though, be taught patience. I had an idea of giving no preface: however, don't you think this had better go? O! let it—one should not be too timid of committing faults.

The climate here weighs us [down] completely; Tom is quite low-spirited. It is impossible to live in a country which is continually under hatches. Who would live in a region of mists, game laws, indemnity bills, &c., when there is such a place as Italy? It is said this England from its clime produces a spleen, able to engender the finest sentiments, and covers the whole face of the isle with green. So it ought, I'm sure.

I should still like the dedication simply, as I said in my last.

I wanted to send you a few songs, written in your favourite Devon. It cannot be! Rain, rain, rain! I am going this morning to take a facsimile of a letter of Nelson's, very much to his honour; you will be greatly pleased when you see it, in about a week.

What a spite it is one cannot get out! The little way I went yesterday, I found a lane banked on each side with a store of primroses, while the earlier bushes are beginning to leaf.

I shall hear a good account of you soon.

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 26.

TEIGNMOUTH, 27 April, 1818.

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:

It is an awful while since you have heard from me. I hope I may not be punished, when I see you well, and so anxious as you always are for me, with the remembrance of my so seldom writing when you were so horribly confined. The most unhappy hours in our lives are those in which we recollect times past to our own blushing. If we are immortal, that must be the Hell. If I must be immortal, I hope it will be after having taken a little of "that watery labyrinth," in order to forget some of my school-boy days, and others since those.

I have heard from George, at different times, how slowly you were recovering. It is a tedious thing; but all medical men will tell you how far a very gradual amendment is preferable. You will be strong after this, never fear.

We are here still enveloped in clouds. I lay awake last night listening to the rain, with the sense of being drowned and rotted like a grain of wheat. There is a continual courtesy between the heavens

and the earth. The heavens rain down their unwell-comeness, and the earth sends it up again, to be returned to-morrow.

Tom has taken a fancy to a physician here, Dr. Turton, and, I think, is getting better; therefore I shall, perhaps, remain here some months. I have written to George for some books—shall learn Greek, and very likely Italian; and, in other ways, prepare myself to ask Hazlitt, in about a year's time, the best metaphysical road I can take. For, although I take poetry to be chief, yet there is something else wanting to one who passes his life among books and thoughts on books. I long to feast upon old Homer as we have upon Shakspeare, and as I have lately upon Milton. If you understand Greek, and would read me passages now and then, explaining their meaning, 'twould be, from its mistiness, perhaps, a greater luxury than reading the thing one's self. I shall be happy when I can do the same for you.

I have written for my folio Shakspeare, in which there are the first few stanzas of my "Pot of Basil." I have the rest here, finished, and will copy the whole out fair shortly, and George will bring it you. The compliment is paid by us to Boccace, whether we publish or no: so there is content in this world. Mind [my poem] is short; you must be deliberate about yours: you must not think of it till many months after you are quite well:—then put your passion to it, and I shall be bound up with you in the shadows of mind, as we are in our matters of human life. Perhaps a stanza or two will not be too foreign to your sickness.

Were they unhappy then? It cannot be:
Too many tears, &c., &c.

But for the general award of love, &c.

She wept alone for pleasures, &c.

The fifth line ran thus:—

What might have been, too plainly did she see.

Give my love to your mother and sisters. Remember me to the Butlers—not forgetting Sarah.

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 27.

TEIGNMOUTH, April 27, 1818.

MY DEAR TAYLOR:

I think I did wrong to leave to you all the trouble of "Endymion." But I could not help it then—another time I shall be more bent to all sorts of troubles and disagreeables. Young men, for some time, have an idea that such a thing as happiness is to be had, and therefore are extremely impatient under any unpleasant restraining. In time, however,—of such stuff is the world about them,—they know better, and instead of striving from uneasiness, greet it as an habitual sensation, a panier which is

to weigh upon them through life. And in proportion to my disgust at the task is my sense of your kindness and anxiety. The book pleased me much. It is very free from faults; and, although there are one or two words I should wish replaced, I see in many places an improvement greatly to the purpose.

I was proposing to travel over the North this summer. There is but one thing to prevent me. I know nothing—I have read nothing—and I mean to follow Solomon's directions, "Get learning—get understanding." I find earlier days are gone by—I find that I can have no enjoyment in the world but continual drinking of knowledge. I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good to the world. Some do it with their society; some with their wit; some with their benevolence; some with a sort of power of conferring pleasure and good humour on all they meet—and in a thousand ways, all dutiful to the command of great Nature. There is but one way for me. The road lies through application, study, and thought. I will pursue it; and, for that end, purpose retiring for some years. I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious and a love for philosophy: were I calculated for the former I should be glad; but as I am not, I shall turn all my soul to the latter.

My brother Tom is getting better, and I hope I shall see both him and Reynolds better before I retire from the world. I shall see you soon, and have some talk about what books I shall take with me.

Your very sincere friend,

JOHN KRATS.

No. 28.

TEIGNMOUTH, May 3, 1818.

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:

What I complain of is, that I have been in so uneasy a state of mind as not to be fit to write to an invalid. I cannot write to any length under a disguised feeling. I should have loaded you with an addition of gloom, which I am sure you do not want. I am now, thank God, in a humour to give you a good groat's worth; for Tom, after a night without a wink of sleep, and over-burthened with fever, has got up, after a refreshing day-sleep, and is better than he has been for a long time. And you, I trust, have been again round the Common without any effect but refreshment. As to the matter, I hope I can say, with Sir Andrew, "I have matter enough in my head," in your favour. And now, in the second place, for I reckon that I have finished my imprimis, I am glad you blow up the weather. All through your letter there is a leaning towards a climate-curse; and you know what a delicate satisfaction there is in having a vexation anathematized. One would think that there has been growing up, for these last four thousand years, a grand-child scion of the old forbidden tree, and that some modern Eve had just violated it; and that there was come, with double charge, "Notus and Afer black with thunderous clouds from Serralliona." Tom wants to be in town: we will have some such days upon the heath like that of last summer—and why not with the same book? or what do you say

to a black-letter Chaucer, printed in 1596? Aye, I have got one, huzza! I shall have it bound in Gothique—a nice sombre binding; it will go a little way to unmodernize. And, also, I see no reason, because I have been away this last month, why I should not have a peep at your Spenserian—notwithstanding you speak of your office, in my thought, a little too early; for I do not see why a mind like yours is not capable of harbouring and digesting the whole mystery of law as easily as Parson Hugh does pippins, which did not hinder him from his poetic canary. Were I to study physic, or rather medicine again, I feel it would not make the least difference in my poetry; when the mind is in its infancy a bias is in reality a bias, but when we have acquired more strength, a bias becomes no bias. Every department of knowledge we see excellent and calculated towards a great whole. I am so convinced of this that I am glad at not having given away my medical books, which I shall again look over, to keep alive the little I know thitherwards; and moreover intend, through you and Rice, to become a sort of pip-civilian. An extensive knowledge is needful to thinking people; it takes away the heat and fever, and helps, by widening speculation, to ease the burden of the mystery, a thing which I begin to understand a little, and which weighed upon you in the most gloomy and true sentence in your letters. The difference of high sensations, with and without knowledge, appears to me this: in the latter case we are continually falling ten thousand fathoms deep, and being blown up again, without wings, and with all [the] horror of

a bare-shouldered creature; in the former case, our shoulders are fledged, and we go through the same air and space without fear. This is running one's rigs on the score of abstracted benefit; when we come to human life and the affections, it is impossible to know how a parallel of breast and head can be drawn (you will forgive me for thus privately treading out [of] my depth, and take it for treading as school-boys tread the water); it is impossible to know how far knowledge will console us for the death of a friend, and the "ills that flesh is heir to." With respect to the affections and poetry, you must know by sympathy my thoughts that way, and I dare say these few lines will be but a ratification. I wrote them on May-day, and intend to finish the ode all in good time.

Mother of Hermes! and still youthful Maia!

May I sing to thee

As thou wast hymned on the shores of Baïæ?

Or may I woo thee

In earlier Sicilian? or thy smiles

Seek as they once were sought, in Grecian isles,

By bards who died content on pleasant sward,

Leaving great verse unto a little clan?

O, give me their old vigour, and unheard

Save of the quiet Primrose, and the span

Of heaven and few ears,

Rounded by thee, my song should die away

Content as theirs,

Rich in the simple worship of a day.

You may perhaps be anxious to know for fact to what sentence in your letter I allude. You say, "I fear there is little chance of anything else in this life." You seem by that to have been going

through, with a more painful and acute zest, the same labyrinth that I have—I have come to the same conclusion thus far. My branchings-out therefrom have been numerous: one of them is the consideration of Wordsworth's genius, and as a help, in the manner of gold being the meridian line of worldly wealth, how he differs from Milton. And here I have nothing but surmises, from an uncertainty whether Milton's apparently less anxiety for humanity proceeds from his seeing further or not than Wordsworth, and whether Wordsworth has, in truth, epic passion, and martyrs himself to the human heart, the main region of his song. In regard to his genius alone, we find what he says true, as far as we have experienced, and we can judge no further but by larger experience; for axioms in philosophy are not axioms till they have been proved upon our pulses. We read fine things, but never feel them to the full until we have gone [over] the same steps as the author. I know this is not plain; you will know exactly my meaning when I say that now I shall relish "Hamlet" more than I ever have done—or better. You are sensible no man can set down venery as a bestial or joyless thing until he is sick of it, and therefore all philosophizing on it would be mere wording. Until we are sick, we understand not; in fine, as Byron says, "Knowledge is sorrow"; and I go on to say that "Sorrow is wisdom"; and further, for aught we can know for certainty, "Wisdom is folly." So you see how I have run away from Wordsworth and Milton, and shall still run away from what was in my head to observe, that some

kind of letters are good squares, others handsome ovals, others orbicular, others spheroid—and why should not there be another species with two rough edges, like a rat-trap? I hope you will find all my long letters of that species, and all will be well; for by merely touching the spring delicately and ethereally, the rough-edged will fly immediately into a proper compactness; and thus you may make a good wholesome loaf, with your own leaven in it, of my fragments. If you cannot find this said rat-trap sufficiently tractable, alas! for me, it being an impossibility in grain for my ink to stain otherwise. If I scribble long letters, I must play my vagaries. I must be too heavy, or too light, for whole pages; I must be quaint, and free of tropes and figures; I must play my draughts as I please, and for my advantage and your erudition, crown a white with a black, or a black with a white, and move into black or white, far and near as I please; I must go from Hazlitt to Patmore, and make Wordsworth and Coleman play at leap-frog, or keep one of them down a whole half-holiday at fly-the-garter; “from Gray to Gay, from Little to Shakspeare.” I shall resume after dinner.

* * * * *

This crossing a letter is not without its association — for chequer-work leads us naturally to a milkmaid, a milkmaid to Hogarth, Hogarth to Shakspeare; Shakspeare to Hazlitt, Hazlitt back to Shakspeare; and thus by merely pulling an apron-string we set a pretty peal of chimes at work. Let them chime on, while, with your patience, I will return to Wordsworth — whether or no he has

an extended vision or a circumscribed grandeur—whether he is an eagle in his nest or on the wing; and, to be more explicit, and to show you how tall I stand by the giant, I will put down a simile of human life as far as I now perceive it; that is, to the point to which I say we both have arrived at. Well, I compare human life to a large mansion of many apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me. The first we step into we call the Infant, or Thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think. We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it, but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle within us. We no sooner get into the second chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere. We see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight. However, among the effects this breathing is father of, is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of man, of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of misery and heartbreak, pain, sickness, and oppression; whereby this Chamber of Maiden-thought becomes gradually darkened, and at the same time, on all sides of it, many doors are set open—but all dark—all leading to dark passages. We see not the balance of good and evil; we are in a mist, *we* are in that state, we feel the "Burden of the Mystery." To this point was Wordsworth

come, as far as I can conceive, when he wrote "Tintern Abbey," and it seems to me that his genius is explorative of those dark passages. Now if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them. He is a genius and superior [to] us, in so far as he can, more than we, make discoveries and shed a light in them. Here I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton, though I think it has depended more upon the general and gregarious advance of intellect than individual greatness of mind. From the "Paradise Lost," and the other works of Milton, I hope it is not too presuming, even between ourselves, to say that his philosophy, human and divine, may be tolerably understood by one not much advanced in years. In his time, Englishmen were just emancipated from a great superstition, and men had got hold of certain points and resting-places in reasoning which were too newly born to be doubted, and too much opposed by the rest of Europe not to be thought ethereal and authentically divine. Who could gainsay his ideas on virtue, vice, and chastity, in "Comus," just at the time of the dismissal of a hundred social disgraces? Who would not rest satisfied with his hintings at good and evil in the "Paradise Lost," when just free from the Inquisition and burning in Smithfield? The Reformation produced such immediate and great benefits that Protestantism was considered under the immediate eye of Heaven, and its own remaining dogmas and superstitions then, as it were, regenerated, constituted those resting-places and seeming sure points of reasoning. From that I have mentioned, Milton, whatever he

may have thought in the sequel, appears to have been content with these by his writings. He did not think with the human heart as Wordsworth has done; yet Milton, as a philosopher, had surely as great powers as Wordsworth. What is then to be inferred? O! many things: it proves there is really a grand march of intellect; it proves that a mighty Providence subdues the mightiest minds to the service of the time being, whether it be in human knowledge or religion.

I have often pitied a tutor who has to hear "Nom. Musa" so often dinn'd into his ears: I hope you may not have the same pain in this scribbling—I may have read these things before, but I never had even a thus dim perception of them; and, moreover, I like to say my lesson to one who will endure my tediousness, for my own sake.

After all, there is something real in the world—Moore's present to Hazlitt is real. I like that Moore, and am glad I saw him at the theatre just before I left town. Tom has spit a *little* blood this afternoon, and that is rather a damper—but I know—the truth is, there is something real in the world. Your third Chamber of Life shall be a lucky and a gentle one, stored with the wine of Love and the bread of Friendship.

When you see George, if he should not have received a letter from me, tell him he will find one at home most likely. Tell Bailey I hope soon to see him. Remember me to all. The leaves have been out here for many a day. I have written to George for the first stanzas of my "Isabel." I

shall have them soon, and will copy the whole out for you.

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 29.

Hampstead, 25 May, 1818.

MY DEAR BAILEY:

I should have answered your letter on the moment, if I could have said yes to your invitation. What hinders me is insuperable: I will tell it at a little length. You know my brother George has been out of employ for some time. It has weighed very much upon him, and driven him to scheme and turn over things in his mind. The result has been his resolution to emigrate to the back settlements of America, become farmer, and work with his own hands, after purchasing fourteen hundred acres of the American Government. This, for many reasons, has met with my entire consent—and the chief one is this: he is of too independent and liberal a mind to get on in trade in this country, in which a generous man with a scanty resource must be ruined. I would sooner he should till the ground than bow to a customer. There is no choice with him: he could not bring himself to the latter. I could not consent to his going alone—no; but that objection is done away with: he will marry, before he sets sail, a young lady he has known for several years, of a nature liberal and high spirited enough to follow him to the banks of the Mississippi. He will set off in a month or six weeks, and you will see how I should wish to pass that time with him.

And then I must set out on a journey of my own. Brown and I are going on a pedestrian tour through the north of England, and Scotland, as far as John o'Grot's.

I have this morning such a lethargy that I cannot write. The reason of my delaying is oftentimes for this feeling,—I wait for a proper temper. Now you ask for an immediate answer, I do not like to wait even till to-morrow. However, I am now so depressed that I have not an idea to put to paper; my hand feels like lead. And yet it is an unpleasant numbness; it does not take away the pain of existence. I don't know what to write.

[*Monday.*]—You see how I have delayed; and even now I have but a confused idea of what I should be about. My intellect must be in a degenerating state—it must be—for when I should be writing about—God knows what—I am troubling you with moods of my own mind, or rather body, for mind there is none. I am in that temper that if I were under water I would scarcely kick to come up to the top. I know very well 'tis all nonsense. In a short time I hope I shall be in a temper to feel sensibly your mention of my book. In vain have I waited till Monday to have any interest in that, or any thing else. I feel no spur at my brother's going to America, and am almost stony-hearted about his wedding. All this will blow over. All I am sorry for is having to write to you in such a time—but I cannot force my letters in a hotbed. I could not feel comfortable in making sentences for you. I am your debtor; I must ever remain so; nor do I wish to be clear of my rational debt: there is a comfort in throwing oneself on the charity of

one's friends—'tis like the albatross sleeping on its wings. I will be to you wine in the cellar, and the more modestly, or rather, indolently, I retire into the backward bin, the more Falerne will I be at the drinking. There is one thing I must mention: my brother talks of sailing in a fortnight; if so, I will most probably be with you a week before I set out for Scotland. The middle of your first page should be sufficient to rouse me. What I said is true, and I have dreamt of your mention of it, and my not answering it has weighed on me since. If I come, I will bring your letter, and hear more fully your sentiments on one or two points. I will call about the lectures at Taylor's, and at Little Britain, to-morrow. Yesterday I dined with Hazlitt, Barnes, and Wilkie, at Haydon's. The topic was the Duke of Wellington—very amusingly pro-and-con'd. Reynolds has been getting much better; and Rice may begin to crow, for he got a little so-so at a party of his, and was none the worse for it the next morning. I hope I shall soon see you, for we must have many new thoughts and feelings to analyse, and to discover whether a little more knowledge has not made us more ignorant.

Yours affectionately,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 30.

London, June 10, 1818.

MY DEAR BAILEY:

I have been very much gratified and very much hurt by your letters in the Oxford paper; because,

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independent of that unlawful and mortal feeling of pleasure at praise, there is a glory in enthusiasm; and because the world is malignant enough to chuckle at the most honorable simplicity. Yes, on my soul, my dear Bailey, you are too simple for the world, and that idea makes me sick of it. How is it that, by extreme opposites, we have, as it were, got discontented nerves? You have all your life (I think so) believed everybody. I have suspected everybody. And, although you have been so deceived, you make a simple appeal. The world has something else to do, and I am glad of it. Were it in my choice, I would reject a Petrarchal coronation—on account of my dying day, and because women have cancers. I should not, by rights, speak in this tone to you, for it is an incendiary spirit that would do so. Yet I am not old enough or magnanimous enough to annihilate self—and it would, perhaps, be paying you an ill compliment. I was in hopes, some little time back, to be able to relieve your dullness by my spirits—to point out things in the world worth your enjoyment—and now I am never alone without rejoicing that there is such a thing as death—without placing my ultimate in the glory of dying for a great human purpose. Perhaps if my affairs were in a different state I should not have written the above—you shall judge: I have two brothers; one is driven, by the “burden of society,” to America; the other, with an exquisite love of life, is in a lingering state. My love for my brothers, from the early loss of our parents, and even from earlier misfortunes, has grown into an affection, “passing the love of women.” I have been

ill-tempered with them, I have vexed them,—but the thought of them has always stifled the impression that any woman might otherwise have made upon me. I have a sister, too; and may not follow them either to America or to the grave. Life must be undergone; and I certainly derive some consolation from the thought of writing one or two more poems before it ceases.

I have heard some hints of your retiring to Scotland. I should like to know your feeling on it: it seems rather remote. Perhaps Gleig will have a duty near you. I am not certain whether I shall be able to go any journey, on account of my brother Tom and a little indisposition of my own. If I do not, you shall see me soon, if not on my return, or I'll quarter myself on you next winter. I had known my sister-in-law some time before she was my sister, and was very fond of her. I like her better and better. She is the most disinterested woman I ever knew—that is to say, she goes beyond degrees in it. To see an entirely disinterested girl quite happy is the most pleasant and extraordinary thing in the world. It depends upon a thousand circumstances. On my word, it is extraordinary. Women must want imagination, and they may thank God for it; and so may we, that a delicate being can feel happy without any sense of crime. It puzzles me, and I have no sort of logic to comfort me: I shall think it over. I am not at home, and your letter being there I cannot look it over to answer any particular—only, I must say I feel that passage of Dante. If I take any book with me it shall be those minute

volumes of Carey, for they will go into the aptest corner.

Reynolds is getting, I may say, robust. His illness has been of service to him. Like every one just recovered, he is high-spirited. I hear also good accounts of Rice. With respect to domestic literature, the "Edinburgh Magazine," in another blow-up against Hunt, calls me "the amiable Mister Keats," and I have more than a laurel from the "Quarterly Reviewers," for they have smothered me in "Foliage." I want to read you my "Pot of Basil." If you go to Scotland, I should much like to read it there to you, among the snows of next winter. My brother's remembrance to you.

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 31.

MAYBOLE, July 11, [1818].

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:

I'll not run over the ground we have passed; that would be nearly as bad as telling a dream—unless, perhaps, I do it in the manner of the Laputan printing press; that is, I put down mountains, rivers, lakes, dells, glens, rocks, with beautiful, enchanting, gothic, picturesque, fine, delightful, enchanting, grand, sublime—a few blisters, etc.,—and now you have our journey thus far, where I begin a letter to you because I am approaching Burns's cottage very fast. We have made continual inquiries from the time we left the tomb at

Dumfries. His name, of course, is known all about: his great reputation among the plodding people is, "that he wrote a good *mony* sensible things." One of the pleasant ways of annulling self is approaching such a shrine as the cottage of Burns: we need not think of his misery—that is all gone, bad luck to it! I shall look upon it hereafter with unmixed pleasure, as I do on my Stratford-on-Avon day with Bailey. I shall fill this sheet for you in the Bardie's country, going no further than this, till I get to the town of Ayr, which will be a nine miles' walk to tea.

We were talking on different and indifferent things, when, on a sudden, we turned a corner upon the immediate country of Ayr. The sight was as rich as possible. I had no conception that the native place of Burns was so beautiful; the idea I had was more desolate: his "Rigs of Barley" seemed always to me but a few strips of green on a cold hill—Oh, prejudice!—It was as rich as Devon. I endeavoured to drink in the prospect, that I might spin it out to you, as the silk-worm makes silk from mulberry leaves. I cannot recollect it. Besides all the beauty, there were the mountains of Annan Isle, black and huge over the sea. We came down upon everything suddenly; there were in our way the "bonny Doon," with the brig that Tam o' Shanter crossed, Kirk Alloway, Burns's cottage, and then the brigs of Ayr. First we stood upon the bridge across the Doon, surrounded by every phantasy of green in tree, meadow, and hill: the stream of the Doon, as a farmer told us, is covered with trees "from head to foot." You

know those beautiful heaths, so fresh against the weather of a summer's evening; there was one stretching along behind the trees.

I wish I knew always the humour my friends would be in at opening a letter of mine, to suit it them as nearly as possible. I could always find an egg-shell for melancholy, and, as for merriment, a witty humour will turn anything to account. My head is sometimes in such a whirl in considering the million likings and antipathies of our moments, that I can get into no settled strain in my letters. My wig! Burns and sentimentality coming across you and Frank Floodgate in the office. Oh, Scenery, that thou shouldst be crushed between two puns! As for them, I venture the rascaliest in the Scotch region. I hope Brown does not put them in his journal: if he does, I must sit on the cutty-stool all next winter. We went to Kirk Allo-way. "A prophet is no prophet in his own country." We went to the cottage and took some whisky. I wrote a sonnet for the mere sake of writing some lines under the roof: they are so bad I cannot transcribe them. The man in the cottage was a great bore with his anecdotes. I hate the rascal. His life consists in fuzy, fuzzy, fuzziest. He drinks glasses, five for the quarter, and twelve for the hour; he is a mahogany-faced old jackass who knew Burns; he ought to have been kicked for having spoken to him. He calls himself "a curious old bitch," but he is a flat old dog. I should like to employ Caliph Vathek to kick him. Oh, the flummery of a birth-place! Cant! cant! cant! It is enough to give a spirit the guts-ache. Many a true word, they say, is spoken in jest — this may be

because his gab hindered my sublimity: the flat dog made me write a flat sonnet. My dear Reynolds, I cannot write about scenery and visitings. Fancy is indeed less than present palpable reality, but it is greater than remembrance. You would lift your eyes from Homer only to see close before you the real Isle of Tenedos. You would rather read Homer afterwards than remember yourself. One song of Burns's is of more worth to you than all I could think for a whole year in his native country. His misery is a dead weight upon the nimbleness of one's quill; I tried to forget it—to drink toddy without any care—to write a merry sonnet—it won't do—he talked, he drank with blackguards; he was miserable. We can see horribly clear, in the works of such a man, his whole life, as if we were God's spies. What were his addresses to Jean in the after part of his life? I should not speak so to you—Yet, why not? You are not in the same case—you are in the right path, and you shall not be deceived. I have spoken to you against marriage, but it was general. The prospect in these matters has been to me so blank that I have not been unwilling to die. I would not now, for I have inducements to live—I must see my little nephews in America, and I must see you marry your lovely wife. My sensations are sometimes deadened for weeks together—but, believe me, I have more than once yearned for the time of your happiness to come, as much as I could for myself after the lips of Juliet. From the tenor of my occasional rhodomontade in chit-chat, you might have been deceived concerning me in these points. Upon my soul, I have been getting more and more close

to you every day, ever since I knew you, and now one of the first pleasures I look to is your happy marriage—the more, since I have felt the pleasure of loving a sister-in-law. I did not think it possible to become so much attached in so short a time. Things like these, and they are real, have made me resolve to have a care of my health—you must be as careful.

The rain has stopped us to-day at the end of a dozen miles, yet we hope to see Loch Lomond the day after to-morrow. I will piddle out my information, as Rice says, next winter, at any time when a substitute is wanted for Vingt-un. We bear the fatigue very well: twenty miles a day, in general. A cloud came over us in getting up Skiddaw—I hope to be more lucky in Ben Lomond, and more lucky still in Ben Nevis. What I think you would enjoy is, picking about ruins, sometimes abbey, sometimes castle.

Tell my friends I do all I can for them; that is, drink their health in toddy. Perhaps I may have some lines, by and by, to send you fresh, on your own letter.

You affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 32.

INVERARY, July 18th, [1818].

MY DEAR BAILEY:

The only day I have had a chance of seeing you when you were last in London I took every ad-

vantage of—some devil led you out of the way. Now, I have written to Reynolds to tell me where you will be in Cumberland—so that I cannot miss you. And here, Bailey, I will say a few words, written in a sane and sober mind (a very scarce thing with me), for they may, hereafter, save you a great deal of trouble about me, which you do not deserve, and for which I ought to be bastinadoed. I carry all matters to an extreme, so that when I have any little vexation it grows, in five minutes, into a theme for Sophocles. Then, and in that temper, if I write to any friend, I have so little self-possession that I give him matter for grieving, at the very time, perhaps, when I am laughing at a pun. Your last letter made me blush for the pain I had given you. I know my own disposition so well that I am certain of writing many times hereafter in the same strain to you: now you know how far to believe in them. You must allow for imagination. I know I shall not be able to help it.

I am sorry you are grieved at my not continuing my visits to Little Britain. Yet I think I have, as far as a man can do who has books to read and subjects to think upon. For that reason I have been nowhere else except to Wentworth Place, so nigh at hand. Moreover, I have been too often in a state of health that made it prudent not to hazard the night air. Yet, further, I will confess to you that I cannot enjoy society, small or numerous. I am certain that our fair are glad I should come for the mere sake of my coming; but I am certain I bring with me a vexation they are better

without. If I can possibly, at any time, feel my temper coming upon me, I refrain even from a promised visit. I am certain I have not a right feeling towards women—at this moment I am striving to be just to them, but I cannot. Is it because they fall so far beneath my boyish imagination? When I was a school-boy I thought a fair woman a pure goddess; my mind was a soft nest in which some one of them slept, though she knew it not. I have no right to expect more than their reality. I thought them ethereal, above men. I find them perhaps equal—great by comparison is very small. Insult may be inflicted in more ways than by word or action. One who is tender of being insulted does not like to think an insult against another. I do not like to think insults in a lady's company. I commit a crime with her which absence would not have known. Is it not extraordinary?—when among men I have no evil thoughts, no malice, no spleen; I feel free to speak or to be silent; I can listen, and from every one I can learn; my hands are in my pockets, I am free from all suspicion, and comfortable. When I am among women, I have evil thoughts, malice, spleen; I cannot speak or be silent; I am full of suspicions, and therefore listen to nothing; I am in a hurry to be gone. You must be charitable, and put all this perversity to my being disappointed since my boyhood. Yet with such feelings I am happier alone, among crowds of men, by myself, or with a friend or two. With all this, trust me, I have not the least idea that men of different feelings and inclinations are more shortsighted than myself. I never rejoiced

more than at my brother's marriage, and shall do so at that of any of my friends. I must absolutely get over this—but how? The only way is to find the root of the evil and so cure it, “with backward mutters of dissevering power.” That is a difficult thing; for an obstinate prejudice can seldom be produced but from a gordian complication of feelings, which must take time to unravel, and care to keep unraveled. I could say a good deal about this, but I will leave it, in hopes of better and more worthy dispositions—and, also, content that I am wronging no one, for, after all, I do think better of womankind than to suppose they care whether Mister John Keats, five feet high, likes them or not. You appeared to wish to know my moods on this subject; don't think it a bore, my dear fellow,—it shall be my Amen.

I should not have consented to myself, these four months, tramping in the Highlands, but that I thought it would give me more experience, rub off more prejudice, use [me] to more hardship, identify finer scenes, load me with grander mountains, and strengthen more my reach in poetry, than would stopping at home among books, even though I should reach Homer. By this time I am comparatively a mountaineer; I have been among wilds and mountains too much to break out much about their grandeur. I have not fed upon oat-cake long enough to be very much attached to it. The first mountains I saw, though not so large as some I have since seen, weighed very solemnly upon me. The effect is wearing away, yet I like them mainly. We have come this evening with a guide—for with-

out was impossible—into the middle of the Isle of Mull, pursuing our cheap journey to Iona, and perhaps Staffa. We would not follow the common and fashionable mode, for the great imposition of expense. We have come over heath, and rock, and river, and bog, to what in England would be called a horrid place. Yet it belongs to a shepherd pretty well off. The family speak not a word but Galic, and we have not yet seen their faces for the smoke, which, after visiting every cranny (not excepting my eyes, very much incommoded for writing), finds its way out at the door. I am more comfortable than I could have imagined in such a place, and so is Brown. The people are all very kind. We lost our way a little yesterday; and inquiring at a cottage, a young woman, without a word, threw on her cloak and walked a mile in a mizzling rain and splashy way to put us right again.

I could not have had a greater pleasure in these parts than your mention of my sister. She is very much prisoned for me. I am afraid it will be some time before I can take her to many places I wish.

I trust we shall see you ere long in Cumberland—at least, I hope I shall, before my visit to America, more than once. I intend to pass a whole year there, if I live to the completion of the three next. My sister's welfare, and the hopes of such a stay in America, will make me observe your advice. I shall be prudent and more careful of my health than I have been.

I hope you will be about paying your first visit to town, after settling when we come into Cumber-

land. Cumberland, however, will be no distance to me after my present journey. I shall spin to you [in] a minute. I begin to get rather a contempt of distances. I hope you will have a nice convenient room for a library. Now you are so well in health, do keep it up by never missing your dinner, by not reading hard, and by taking proper exercise. You'll have a horse, I suppose, so you must make a point of sweating him. You say I must study Dante: well, the only books I have with me are those three little volumes. I read that fine passage you mention a few days ago. Your letter followed me from Hampstead to Port Patrick, and thence to Glasgow. You must think me, by this time, a very pretty fellow.

One of the pleasantest bouts we have had was our walk to Burns's cottage, over the Doon, and past Kirk Alloway. I had determined to write a sonnet in the cottage. I did; but it was so wretched I destroyed it: however, in a few days afterwards I wrote some lines^a cousin-german to the circumstance, which I will transcribe, or rather cross-scribe, in the front of this.

Reynolds's illness has made him a new man; he will be stronger than ever: before I left London, he was really getting a fat face.

Brown keeps on writing volumes of adventures to Dilke. When we get in of an evening, and I have perhaps taken my rest on a couple of chairs, he affronts my indolence and luxury by pulling out of his knapsack, first, his paper; secondly, his pens; and lastly, his ink. Now I would not care if he would change a little. I say now, why not, Bailey,

^a These lines, omitted here by Mr. Wood, are those beginning—

"There is a charm in looking slow across a
valley plain."

See vol. II. p. 236.

take out his pens first sometimes. But I might as well tell a hen to hold up her head before she drinks, instead of afterwards.

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

FROM THE OUTSIDE SHEET OF THE SAME LETTER.

“There has been a flaming attack upon Hunt in the ‘Edinburgh Magazine.’ I never read anything so virulent—accusing him of the greatest crimes, depreciating his wife, his poetry, his habits, his company, his conversation. These philippics are to come out in numbers—called ‘The Cockney School of Poetry.’ There has been but one number published,—that on Hunt,—to which they have prefixed a motto from one Cornelius Webb, ‘Poet-aster’—who, unfortunately, was of our party occasionally at Hampstead, and took it into his head to write the following: something about ‘We’ll talk on Wordsworth, Byron, a theme we never tire on’; and so forth, till he comes to Hunt and Keats. In the motto they have put Hunt and Keats in large letters. I have no doubt that the second number was intended for me, but have hopes of its non-appearance, from the following advertisement in last Sunday’s ‘Examiner’: ‘To Z.—The writer of the article signed Z, in ‘Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine’ for October, 1817, is invited to send his address to the printer of the ‘Examiner,’ in order that justice may be executed on the proper person.’ I don’t mind the thing much; but if he should go to such lengths with me as he has done

with Hunt, I must infallibly call him to account, if he be a human being, and appears in squares and theatres, where we might 'possibly meet.'

No. 33.

9th Oct. 1818.

MY DEAR HESSEY:

You are very good in sending me the letters from the "*Chronicle*," and I am very bad in not acknowledging such a kindness sooner; pray forgive me. It has so chanced that I have had that paper every day. I have seen to-day's. I cannot but feel indebted to those gentlemen who have taken my part. As for the rest, I begin to get a little acquainted with my own strength and weakness. Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic on his own works. My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what "*Blackwood*" or the "*Quarterly*" could inflict; and also when I feel I am right, no external praise can give me such a glow as my own solitary re-perception and ratification of what is fine. J. S. is perfectly right in regard to the "*slipshod Endymion*." That it is so is no fault of mine. No! though it may sound a little paradoxical, it is as good as I had power to make it by myself. Had I been nervous about it being a perfect piece, and with that view asked advice, and trembled over every page, it would not have been written; for it is not in my nature to fumble. I will write independently. I

have written independently *without judgement*. I may write independently, and *with judgement*, hereafter. The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man. It cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself. That which is creative must create itself. In "Endymion," I leaped headlong into the sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the soundings, the quicksands, and the rocks, than if I had stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took tea and comfortable advice. I was never afraid of failure; for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest. But I am nigh getting into a rant; so, with remembrances to Taylor and Woodhouse, &c., I am,

Yours very sincerely,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 34.

TEIGNMOUTH, Sept. 1818.

MY DEAR BAILEY:

When a poor devil is drowning, it is said he comes thrice to the surface before he makes his final sink; if, however, at third rise he can manage to catch hold of a piece of weed or rock, he stands a fair chance, as I hope I do now, of being saved. I have sunk twice in our correspondence, have risen twice, and have been too idle, or something worse, to extricate myself. I have sunk the third time, and just now risen again at this two of the clock P. M., and saved myself from utter perdition by beginning

this, all drenched as I am, and fresh from the water. And I would rather endure the present inconvenience of a wet jacket than you should keep a laced one in store for me. Why did I not stop at Oxford in my way? How can you ask such a question? Why did I not promise to do so? Did I not, in a letter to you, make a promise to do so? Then how can you be so unreasonable as to ask me why I did not? This is the thing—(for I have been rubbing my invention; trying several sleights: I first polished a cold, felt it in my fingers, tried it on the table, but could not pocket it: I tried chilblains, rheumatism, gout, tight boots,—nothing of that sort would do,—so this is, as I was going to say, the thing)—I had a letter from Tom, saying how much better he had got, and thinking he had better stop, I went down to prevent his coming up. Will not this do? Turn it which way you like—it is salvaged all round. I have used it, these three last days, to keep out the abominable Devonshire weather. By the by, you may say what you will of Devonshire: the truth is, it is a splashy, rainy, misty, snowy, foggy, haily, floody, muddy, slipshod county. The hills are very beautiful, when you get a sight of 'em; the primroses are out,—but then you are in; the cliffs are of a fine deep colour, but then the clouds are continually vying with them. The women like your London people in a sort of negative way—because the native men are the poorest creatures in England. When I think of Wordsworth's sonnet, "Vanguard of Liberty! ye men of Kent!" the degenerated race about me are *pulvis Ipecac. simplex*—a strong dose. Were I a corsair, I'd make a

descent on the south coast of Devon, if I did not run the chance of having cowardice imputed to me. As for the men, they'd run away into the Methodist meeting-houses; and the women would be glad of it. Had England been a large Devonshire, we should not have won the battle of Waterloo. There are knotted oaks, there are lusty rivulets, there are meadows such as are not elsewhere,—but there are no thews and sinews. “Moore's Almanack” is here a curiosity: arms, neck, and shoulders may at least be seen there, and the ladies read it as some out-of-the-way romance. Such a quelling power have these thoughts over me that I fancy the very air of a deteriorating quality. I fancy the flowers, all precocious, have an Acrasian spell about them; I feel able to beat off the Devonshire waves like soap-froth. I think it well, for the honour of England, that Julius Cæsar did not first land in this county. A Devonshirer, standing on his native hills, is not a distinct object; he does not show against the light; a wolf or two would dispossess him. I like, I love England—I like its living men. Give me a long brown plain for my money, so I may meet with some of Edmund Ironside's descendants; give me a barren mould, so I may meet with some shadowing of Alfred in the shape of a gipsey, a huntsman, or a shepherd. Scenery is fine, but human nature is finer; the sward is richer for the tread of a real nervous English foot; the eagle's nest is finer for the mountaineer having looked into it. Are these facts or prejudices? Whatever they be, for them I shall never be able to relish entirely any Devonshire scenery. Homer is fine, Achilles

is fine, Diomed is fine, Shakspeare is fine—Hamlet is fine, Lear is fine—but dwindled Englishmen are not fine. Where, too, the women are so passable, and have such English names, such as Ophelia, Cordelia, &c., that they should have such paramours, or rather imparamours! As for them, I cannot, in thought, help wishing, as did the cruel emperor, that they had but one head, that I might cut it off, to deliver them from any horrible courtesy they may do their undeserving countrymen. I wonder I meet with no born monsters. O! Devonshire, last night I thought the moon had dwindled in heaven.

I have never had your sermon from Wordsworth, but Mr. Dilke lent it me. You know my ideas about Religion. I do not think myself more in the right than other people, and that nothing in this world is provable. I wish I could enter into all your feelings on the subject, merely for one short ten minutes, and give you a page or two to your liking. I am sometimes so very skeptical as to think poetry itself a mere Jack o' Lanthorn to amuse whoever may chance to be struck with its brilliance. As tradesmen say everything is worth what it will fetch, so probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer—being in itself a nothing. Ethereal things may at least be thus real, divided under three heads—things real, things semi-real, and nothings; things real, such as existences of sun, moon, and stars, and passages of Shakspeare; things semi-real, such as love, the clouds, &c., which require a greeting of the spirit to make them wholly exist; and nothings

which are made great and dignified by an ardent pursuit—which, by the by, stamp the Burgundy-mark on the bottles of our minds, insomuch as they are able to “*consecrate what’e’r they look upon.*” I have written a sonnet here of a somewhat collateral nature. So don’t imagine it is “*apropos des bottles.*”

Four seasons fill the measure of the year, etc.¹

Aye, this may be carried—but what am I talking of? It is an old maxim of mine, and of course must be well known, that every point of thought is the centre of an intellectual world. The two uppermost thoughts in a man’s mind are the two poles of his world; he revolves on them, and everything is southward and northward to him through their means. We take but three steps from feathers to iron. Now, my dear fellow, I must, once for all, tell you I have not one idea of the truth of any of my speculations: I shall never be a reasoner, because I care not to be in the right, when retired from bickering and in a proper philosophical temper. So you must not stare if, in any future letter, I endeavour to prove that Apollo, as he had catgut strings to his lyre, used a cat’s paw as a pecten—and, further, from [the] said pecten’s reiterated and continual teasing came the term *hen-pecked*.

My brother Tom desires to be remembered to you; he has just this moment had a spitting of blood, poor fellow! Remember me to Grey and Whitehead.

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

¹ See the Poems.

No. 35.

[Post-mark HAMPSTEAD, 27 Oct. 1818.]

MY DEAR WOODHOUSE:

Your letter gave me great satisfaction, more on account of its friendliness than any relish of that matter in it which is accounted so acceptable in the "genus irritabile." The best answer I can give you is in a clerklike manner to make some observations on two principal points which seem to point like indices into the midst of the whole *pro* and *con* about genius, and views, and achievements, and ambition, *et cetera*. 1st. As to the poetical character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am anything, I am a member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian, or egotistical sublime; which is a thing *per se*, and stands alone), it is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing—it has no character—it enjoys light and shade—it lives in gusts, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated—it has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the cameleon poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things, any more than from its taste for the bright one, because they both end in speculation. A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no identity; he is continually in for and filling some other body. The sun, the moon, the sea, and men and women, who are creatures of impulse, are poetical, and have about them an unchangeable attribute; the poet

has none, no identity. He is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's creatures. If, then, he has no self, and if I am a poet, where is the wonder that I should say I would write no more? Might I not at that very instant have been cogitating on the characters of Saturn and Ops? It is a wretched thing to confess, but it is a very fact, that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature. How can it, when I have no nature? When I am in a room with people, if I am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then, not myself goes home to myself, but the identity of every one in the room begins to press upon me, [so] that I am in a very little time annihilated—not only among men; it would be the same in a nursery of children. I know not whether I make myself wholly understood: I hope enough to let you see that no dependence is to be placed on what I said that day.

In the second place, I will speak of my views, and of the life I purpose to myself. I am ambitious of doing the world some good: if I should be spared, that may be the work of future years. In the interval I will assay to reach to as high a summit in poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer. The faint conceptions I have of poems to come bring the blood frequently into my forehead. All I hope is that I may not lose all interest in human affairs—that the solitary indifference I feel for applause, even from the finest spirits, will not blunt any acuteness of vision I may have. I do not think it will. I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the beau-

tiful, even if my night's labours should be burnt every morning, and no eye ever shine upon them. But even now I am perhaps not speaking from myself, but from some character in whose soul I now live.

I am sure, however, that this next sentence is from myself: I feel your anxiety, good opinion, and friendship in the highest degree, and am

Yours most sincerely,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 36.

WELL WALK, Nov. 24th, 1818.

MY DEAR RICE:

Your *amende honorable* I must call "*un surcroit d'amitié*," for I am not at all sensible of anything but that you were unfortunately engaged and I was unfortunately in a hurry. I completely understand your feeling in this mistake, and find in it that balance of comfort which remains after regretting your uneasiness. I have long made up my mind to take for granted the genuine-heartedness of my friends, notwithstanding any temporary ambiguousness in their behaviour or their tongues—nothing of which, however, I had the least scent of this morning. I say completely understand; for I am everlastingly getting my mind into such like painful trammels—and am even at this moment suffering under them in the case of a friend of ours. I will tell you two most unfortunate and parallel slips—it seems downright pre-intention: A friend says to me, "Keats, I shall go and see Severn

this week." — "Ah! (says I) you want him to take your portrait." And again, "Keats," says a friend, "when will you come to town again?" "I will," says I, "let you have the MS. next week." In both these cases I appeared to attribute an interested motive to each of my friends' questions — the first made him flush, the second made him look angry: — and yet I am innocent in both cases; my mind leapt over every interval, to what I saw was, *per se*, a pleasant subject with him. You see I have no allowances to make — you see how far I am from supposing you could show me any neglect. I very much regret the long time I have been obliged to exile from you, for I have one or two rather pleasant occasions to confer upon with you. What I have heard from George is favorable. I expect a letter from the settlement itself.

Your sincere friend,

JOHN KEATS.

I cannot give any good news of Tom.

No. 37.

WENTWORTH PLACE, HAMPSTEAD,
18 Dec. 1818.

MY DEAR WOODHOUSE:

I am greatly obliged to you. I must needs feel flattered by making an impression on a set of ladies. I should be content to do so by meretricious romance verse, if they alone, and not men, were to

judge. I should like very much to know those ladies—though look here, Woodhouse—I have a new leaf to turn over: I must work; I must read; I must write. I am unable to afford time for new acquaintances. I am scarcely able to do my duty to those I have. Leave the matter to chance. But do not forget to give my remembrances to your cousin.

Yours most sincerely,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 38.

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:

Believe me, I have rather rejoiced at your happiness than fretted at your silence. Indeed I am grieved, on your account, that I am not at the same time happy. But I conjure you to think, at present, of nothing but pleasure: "Gather the rose," &c., gorge the honey of life. I pity you as much that it cannot last for ever, as I do myself now drinking bitters. Give yourself up to it—you cannot help it—and I have a consolation in thinking so. I never was in love, yet the voice and shape of a woman has haunted me these two days—at such a time when the relief, the feverish relief of poetry, seems a much less crime. This morning poetry has conquered—I have relapsed into those abstractions which are my only life—I feel escaped from a new, strange, and threatening sorrow, and I am thankful for it. There is an awful warmth about my heart, like a load of immortality.

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Poor Tom—that woman and poetry were ringing changes in my senses. Now I am, in comparison, happy. I am sensible this will distress you—you must forgive me. Had I known you would have set out so soon I would have sent you the “Pot of Basil,” for I had copied it out ready. Here is a free translation of a sonnet of Ronsard, which I think will please you. I have the loan of his works—they have great beauties.

Nature withheld Cassandra in the skies,
For more adornment, a full thousand years;
She took their cream of Beauty's fairest dies,
And shaped and tinted her above all Peers :
Meanwhile Love kept her dearly with his wings,
And underneath her shadow filled her eyes
With such a richness that the cloudy Kings
Of high Olympus uttered slavish sighs.
When from the Heavens I saw her first descend,
My heart took fire, and only burning pains,
They were my pleasures—they my Life's sad end ;
Love poured her beauty into my warm veins,
So that her image in my soul upgrew,
The only thing adorable and true.

I had not the original by me when I wrote it, and did not recollect the purport of the last lines.

I should have seen Rice ere this, but I am confined by Sawney's mandate in the house now, and have, as yet, only gone out in fear of the damp night. I shall soon be quite recovered. Your offer I shall remember as though it had even now taken place in fact. I think it cannot be. Tom is not up yet—I cannot say he is better. I have not heard from George.

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 39.

FROM A LETTER TO REYNOLDS.

a Shanklin July 12, 1819.

"You will be glad to hear, under my own hand (though Rice says we are like Sauntering Jack and Idle Joe), how diligent I have been and am being. I have finished the act, and in the interval of beginning the second have proceeded pretty well with 'Lamia,' finishing the first part, which consists of about four hundred lines. . . . I have great hopes of success, because I make use of my judgement more deliberately than I have yet done; but in case of failure with the world, I shall find my content. And here (as I know you have my good at heart as much as a brother) I can only repeat to you what I have said to George — that however I should like to enjoy what the competencies of life procure, I am in no wise dashed at a different prospect. I have spent too many thoughtful days and moralized through too many nights for that, and fruitless would they be, indeed, if they did not, by degrees, make me look upon the affairs of the world with a healthy deliberation. I have of late been moulting — not for fresh feathers and wings, — they are gone, and in their stead I hope to have a pair of patient sublunary legs. I have altered, not from a chrysalis into a butterfly, but the contrary; having too little loopholes, whence I may look out into the stage of the world: and that world, on our coming here, I almost forgot. The first time I sat down to write, I could scarcely

a letter to Mr. Reynolds, dated Shanklin July 12- [1819], contains allusions to his literary progress and his pecuniary difficulties: — "you will be glad to hear," etc. — Northampton, Lisle, p. 250.

believe in the necessity for so doing. It struck me as a great oddity. Yet the very corn which is now so beautiful, as if it had only took to ripening yesterday, is for the market; so, why should I be delicate?"

* * * * *

No. 40.

SHANKLIN, August 2, 1819.

MY DEAR DILKE :

I will not make my diligence an excuse for not writing to you sooner, because I consider idleness a much better plea. A man in the hurry of business of any sort is expected, and ought to be expected, to look to everything; his mind is in a whirl, and what matters it what whirl? But to require a letter of a man lost in idleness is the utmost cruelty; you cut the thread of his existence; you beat, you pummel him; you sell his goods and chattels; you put him in prison; you impale him; you crucify him. If I had not put pen to paper since I saw you, this would be to me a *vi et armis* taking up before the judge; but having got over my darling lounging habits a little, it is with scarcely any pain I come to this dating from Shanklin. The Isle of Wight is but so-so, &c. Rice and I passed rather a dull time of it. I hope he will not repent coming with me. He was unwell, and I was not in very good health; and I am afraid we made each other worse by acting upon each other's spirits. We would grow as melancholy as need be. I confess I cannot bear a sick person in a house, especially

alone. It weighs upon me day and night, and more so when perhaps the cause is irretrievable. Indeed, I think Rice is in a dangerous state. I have had a letter from him which speaks favourably of his health at present. Brown and I are pretty well harnessed again to our dog-cart,—I mean the tragedy, which goes on sinkingly. We are thinking of introducing an elephant, but have not historical reference within reach to determine us as to Otho's menagerie. When Brown first mentioned this I took it for a joke; however, he brings such plausible reasons, and discourses so eloquently on the dramatic effect, that I am giving it a serious consideration. The art of poetry is not sufficient for us, and if we get on in that as well as we do in painting, we shall, by next winter, crush the Reviews and the Royal Academy. Indeed, if Brown would take a little of my advice, he could not fail to be first palette of his day. But, odd as it may appear, he says plainly that he cannot see any force in my plea of putting skies in the back-ground, and leaving Indian-ink out of an ash-tree. The other day he was sketching Shanklin Church, and as I saw how the business was going on, I challenged him to a trial of skill: he lent me pencil and paper. We keep the sketches to contend for the prize at the Gallery. I will not say whose I think best, but really I do not think Brown's done to the top of the art.

A word or two on the Isle of Wight. I have been no further than Steeplehill. If I may guess, I should [say] that there is no finer part in the island than from this place to Steeplehill. I do not hesitate

to say it is fine. Bonchurch is the best. But I have been so many finer walks, with a back-ground of lake and mountain instead of the sea, that I am not much touched with it, though I credit it for all the surprise I should have felt if it had taken my cockney maiden-head. But I may call myself an old stager in the picturesque, and unless it be something very large and overpowering, I cannot receive any extraordinary relish.

I am sorry to hear that Charles^a is so much oppressed at Westminster, though I am sure it will be the finest touchstone for his metal in the world. His troubles will grow, day by day, less as his age and strength increase. The very first battle he wins will lift him from the tribe of Manasseh. I do not know how I should feel were I a father, but I hope I should strive with all my power not to let the present trouble me. When your boy shall be twenty, ask him about his childish troubles, and he will have no more memory of them than you have of yours.

So Reynolds's piece succeeded: that is all well. Papers have, with thanks, been duly received. We leave this place on the 13th, and will let you know where we may be a few days after. Brown says he will write when the fit comes on him. If you will stand law expenses, I'll beat him into one before his time.

Your sincere friend,

JOHN KEATS.

In August, the friends removed to Winchester, where Mr. Brown, however, soon left him alone.

^a
See Charles Norton's Life, 1841.

This was always a favourite residence of Keats: the noble cathedral and its quiet close—the green-sward and elm-tree walks were especially agreeable to him. He wrote thence the following letters and extracts:

No. 41.

TO HAYDON, FROM WINCHESTER.

I came here in the hopes of getting a library, but there is none: the High street is as quiet as a lamb. At Mr. Cross's is a very interesting picture of Albert Durer, who, being alive in such warlike times, was perhaps forced to paint in his gauntlets, so we must make all allowances.

* * * * *

I have done nothing, except for the amusement of a few people who refine upon their feelings till anything in the *un*-understandable way will go down with them. I have no cause to complain, because I am certain anything really fine will in these days be felt. I have no doubt that if I had written "Othello" I should have been cheered. I shall go on with patience.

No. 42.

TO MR. BAILEY.

We removed to Winchester for the convenience of a library, and find it an exceedingly pleasant town, enriched with a beautiful cathedral, and sur-

rounded by a fresh-looking country. We are in tolerably good and cheap lodgings. Within these two months I have written fifteen hundred lines, most of which, besides many more of prior composition, you will probably see by next winter. I have written two tales, one from Boccaccio, called the "Pot of Basil," and another called "St. Agnes' Eve," on a popular superstition, and a third called "Lamia" (half finished). I have also been writing parts of my "Hyperion," and completed four acts of a tragedy. It was the opinion of most of my friends that I should never be able to write a scene: I will endeavour to wipe away the prejudice. I sincerely hope you will be pleased when my labours, since we last saw each other, shall reach you. One of my ambitions is to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting. Another, to upset the drawling of the blue-stocking literary world. If, in the course of a few years, I do these two things, I ought to die content, and my friends should drink a dozen of claret on my tomb. I am convinced more and more every day that (excepting the human-friend philosopher) a fine writer is the most genuine being in the world. Shakspeare and the "Paradise Lost" every day become greater wonders to me. I look upon fine phrases like a lover.

I was glad to see, by a passage of one of Brown's letters some time ago from the North, that you were in such good spirits. Since that you have been married, and in congratulating you I wish you every continuance of them. Present my respects to Mrs. Bailey. This sounds oddly to me, and I

dare say I do it awkwardly enough ; but I suppose by this time it is nothing new to you.

Brown's remembrances to you. As far as I know, we shall remain at Winchester for a goodish while.

Ever your sincere friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 43.

WINCHESTER, 23d August, 1819.

MY DEAR TAYLOR :

* * * * *

I feel every confidence that, if I choose, I may be a popular writer. That I will never be ; but for all that I will get a livelihood. I equally dislike the favour of the publick with the love of a woman. They are both a cloying treacle to the wings of independence. I shall now consider them (the people) as debtors to me for verses, not myself to them for admiration, which I can do without. I have of late been indulging my spleen by composing a preface AT them ; after all resolving never to write a preface at all. "*There* are so many verses," would I have said to them ; "give so much means for me to buy pleasure with, as a relief to my hours of labour." You will observe at the end of this, if you put down the letter, "How a solitary life engenders pride and egotism !" True—I know it does : but this pride and egotism will enable me to write finer things than anything else could, so I will indulge it. Just so much as I am humbled by the genius above my grasp, am I exalted and look with hate and con-

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tempt upon the literary world. A drummer-boy who holds out his hand familiarly to a field-marshal, — that drummer-boy with me is the good word and favour of the publick. Who could wish to be among the commonplace crowd of the little-famous, who are each individually lost in a throng made up of themselves? Is this worth louting or playing the hypocrite for? To beg suffrages for a seat on the benches of a myriad-aristocracy in letters? This is not wise—I am not a wise man. 'Tis pride. I will give you a definition of a proud man. He is a man who has neither vanity nor wisdom—one filled with hatred cannot be vain, neither can he be wise. Pardon me for hammering instead of writing. Remember me to Woodhouse, Hessey, and all in Percy street.

Ever yours sincerely,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 44.

WINCHESTER, August 25 [1819].

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:

By this post I write to Rice, who will tell you why we have left Shanklin, and how we like this place. I have indeed scarcely anything else to say, leading so monotonous a life, unless I was to give you a history of sensations and day night-mares. You would not find me at all unhappy in it, as all my thoughts and feelings, which are of the selfish nature, home speculations, every day continue to make me more iron. I am convinced more and

more, every day, that fine writing is, next to fine doing, the top thing in the world; the "Paradise Lost" becomes a greater wonder. The more I know what my diligence may in time probably effect, the more does my heart distend with pride and obstinacy. I feel it in my power to become a popular writer. I feel it in my power to refuse the poisonous suffrage of a publick. My own being, which I know to be, becomes of more consequence to me than the crowds of shadows in the shape of men and women that inhabit a kingdom. The soul is a world of itself, and has enough to do in its own home. Those whom I know already, and who have grown as it were a part of myself, I could not do without; but for the rest of mankind, they are as much a dream to me as Milton's "Hierarchies." I think if I had a free and healthy and lasting organization of heart, and lungs as strong as an ox, so as to be able [to bear] unhurt the shock of extreme thought and sensation without weariness, I could pass my life very nearly alone, though it should last eighty years. But I feel my body too weak to support me to this height; I am obliged continually to check myself, and be nothing.

It would be vain for me to endeavour after a more reasonable manner of writing to you. I have nothing to speak of but myself, and what can I say but what I feel? If you should have any reason to regret this state of excitement in me, I will turn the tide of your feelings in the right channel, by mentioning that it is the only state for the best sort of poetry—that is all I care for, all I live for. Forgive me for not filling up the whole sheet; letters

become so irksome to me, that the next time I leave London I shall petition them all to be spared to me. To give me credit for constancy, and at the same time waive letter-writing, will be the highest indulgence I can think of.

Ever your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 45.

WINCHESTER, Wednesday Evening.

MY DEAR DILKE :

Whatever I take to, for the time, I cannot leave off in a hurry; letter-writing is the go now; I have consumed a quire at least. You must give me credit now for a free letter, when it is in reality an interested one on two points, the one requestive, the other verging to the pros and cons. As I expect they will lead me to seeing and conferring with you for a short time, I shall not enter at all upon a letter I have lately received from George, of not the most comfortable intelligence, but proceed to these two points, which, if you can Hume out into sections and subsections, for my edification, you will oblige me. The first I shall begin upon; the other will follow like a tail to a comet. I have written to Brown on the subject, and can but go over the same ground with you in a very short time, it not being more in length than the ordinary paces between the wickets. It concerns a resolution I have taken to endeavour to acquire something by temporary writing in periodical works.

You must agree with me how unwise it is to keep feeding upon hopes which, depending so much on the state of temper and imagination, appear gloomy or bright, near or afar off, just as it happens. Now an act has three parts—to act, to do, and to perform—I mean I should *do* something for my immediate welfare. Even if I am swept away like a spider from a drawing-room, I am determined to spin—home-spun, anything for sale. Yea, I will traffick, anything but mortgage my brain to Blackwood. I am determined not to lie like a dead lump. You may say I want tact. That is easily acquired. You may be up to the slang of a cockpit in three battles. It is fortunate I have not before this been tempted to venture on the common. I should, a year or two ago, have spoken my mind on every subject with the utmost simplicity. I hope I have learned a little better, and am confident I shall be able to cheat as well as any literary Jew of the market, and shine up an article on anything, without much knowledge of the subject, aye, like an orange. I would willingly have recourse to other means. I cannot; I am fit for nothing but literature. / Wait for the issue of this tragedy? No; there cannot be greater uncertainties, east, west, north, and south, than concerning dramatic composition. How many months must I wait! Had I not better begin to look about me now? If better events supersede this necessity, what harm will be done? I have no trust whatever on poetry. I don't wonder at it: the marvel is to me how people read so much of it. I think you will see the reasonableness of my plan. To

forward it, I purpose living in cheap lodgings in town, that I may be in the reach of books and information, of which there is here a plentiful lack. If I can [find] any place tolerably comfortable, I will settle myself and fag till I can afford to buy pleasure, which, if [I] never can afford, I must go without. Talking of pleasure, this moment I was writing with one hand and with the other holding to my mouth a nectarine. Good God, how fine! It went down soft, pulpy, slushy, oozy — all its delicious *embonpoint* melted down my throat like a large beatified strawberry. Now I come to my request. Should you like me for a neighbour again? Come, plump it out, I won't blush. I should also be in the neighbourhood of Mrs. Wylie, which I should be glad of, though that of course does not influence me. Therefore, will you look about Rodney street for a couple of rooms for me? — rooms like the gallant's legs in Massinger's time, "as good as the times allow, Sir!" I have written to-day to Reynolds, and to Woodhouse. Do you know him? He is a friend of Taylor's, at whom Brown has taken one of his funny odd dislikes. I'm sure he's wrong, because Woodhouse likes my poetry — conclusive. I ask your opinion, and yet I must say to you, as to him (Brown), that if you have anything to say against it I shall be as obstinate and heady as a Radical. By the "Examiners" coming in your handwriting you must be in town. They have put me into spirits. Notwithstanding my aristocratic temper, I cannot help being very much pleased with the present publick proceedings. I hope sincerely I shall be able to put a mite of

help to the liberal side of the question before I die. If you should have left town again (for your holidays cannot be up yet), let me know when this is forwarded to you. A most extraordinary mischance has befallen two letters I wrote Brown — one from London, whither I was obliged to go on business for George; the other from this place since my return. I can't make it out. I am excessively sorry for it. I shall hear from Brown and from you almost together, for I have sent him a letter to-day.

Ever your sincere friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 46.

WINCHESTER, Sept. 5, 1819.

MY DEAR TAYLOR:

This morning I received yours of the 2nd, and with it a letter from Hessey, inclosing a bank post bill for £30, an ample sum, I assure you — more I had not thought of. You should not have delayed so long in Fleet street; leading an inactive life as you did was breathing poison: you will find the country air do more for you than you expect. But it must be proper country air. You must choose a spot. What sort of a place is Retford? You should have a dry, gravelly, barren, elevated country, open to the currents of air, and such a place is generally furnished with the finest springs. The neighbourhood of a rich, inclosed, fulsome, manured, arable land, especially in a valley, and almost as

bad on a flat, would be almost as bad as the smoke of Fleet street. Such a place as this was Shanklin; only open to the south-east, and surrounded by hills in every other direction. From this south-east came the damps from the sea, which, having no egress, the air would for days together take on an unhealthy idiosyncrasy altogether enervating and weakening as a city smoke. I felt it very much. Since I have been here in Winchester I have been improving in health: it is not so confined, and there is, on one side of the city, a dry, chalky down, where the air is worth six-pence a pint. So if you do not get better at Retford, do not impute it to your own weakness until you have well considered the nature of the air and soil—especially as Autumn is encroaching—for the Autumn fog over a rich land is like the steam from cabbage water. What makes the great difference between valesmen, flatlandmen, and mountaineers? The cultivation of the earth, in a great measure. Our health, temperament, and disposition are taken more (notwithstanding the contradiction of the history of Cain and Abel) from the air we breathe than is generally imagined. See the difference between a peasant and a butcher. I am convinced a great cause of it is the difference of the air they breathe: the one takes his mingled with the fume of slaughter, the other from the dank exhalament from the glebe; the teeming damp that comes up from the plough-furrow is of more effect in taming the fierceness of a strong man than his labour. Let him be mowing furze upon a mountain, and at the day's end his thoughts will run upon a pick-axe,

if he ever had handled one ; let him leave the plough, and he will think quietly of his supper. Agriculture is the tamer of men—the steam from the earth is like drinking their mother's milk—it enervates their nature. This appears a great cause of the imbecility of the Chinese: and if this sort of atmosphere is a mitigation to the energies of a strong man, how much more must it injure a weak one, unoccupied, unexercised? For what is the cause of so many men maintaining a good state in cities, but occupation? An idle man, a man who is not sensitively alive to self-interest, in a city cannot continue long in good health. This is easily explained. If you were to walk leisurely through an unwholesome path in the fens, with a little horror of them, you would be sure to have your ague. But let Macbeth cross the same path, with the dagger in the air leading him on, and he would never have an ague or anything like it. You should give these things a serious consideration. Notts, I believe, is a flat country. You should be on the slope of one of the dry barren hills in Somersetshire. I am convinced there is as harmful air to be breathed in the country as in town.

I am greatly obliged to you for your letter. Perhaps, if you had had strength and spirits enough, you would have felt offended by my offering a note of hand, or rather expressed it. However, I am sure you will give me credit for not in anywise mistrusting you; or imagining that you would take advantage of any power I might give you over me. No, it proceeded from my serious resolve not to be a gratuitous borrower, from a great desire to be cor-

rect in money matters, to have in my desk the chronicles of them to refer to, and know my worldly non-estate: besides, in case of my death, such documents would be but just, if merely as memorials of the friendly turns I had done to me.

Had I known of your illness I should not have written in such fiery phrase in my first letter. I hope that shortly you will be able to bear six times as much.

Brown likes the tragedy very much, but he is not a fit judge of it, as I have only acted as midwife to his plot, and of course he will be fond of his child. I do not think I can make you any extracts without spoiling the effect of the whole when you come to read it. I hope you will then not think my labour misspent. Since I finished it I have finished "*Lamia*," and am now occupied in revising "*St. Agnes' Eve*," and studying Italian. Ariosto I find as diffuse, in parts, as Spenser. I understand completely the difference between them. I will cross the letter with some lines from "*Lamia*."

Brown's kindest remembrances to you, and I am ever your most sincere friend,
JOHN KEATS.

I shall be alone here for three weeks, expecting account of your health.

No. 47.

WINCHESTER, 22d Sept. 1819.

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:

I was very glad to hear from Woodhouse that you would meet in the country. I hope you will

pass some pleasant time together, which I wish to make pleasanter by a brace of letters, very highly to be estimated, as really I have had very bad luck with this sort of game this season. I "kepen in solitarinesse," for Brown has gone a-visiting. I am surprised myself at the pleasure I live alone in. I can give you no news of the place here, or any other idea of it, but what I have to this effect written to George. Yesterday, I say to him, was a grand day for Winchester. They elected a mayor. It was indeed high time the place should receive some sort of excitement. There was nothing going on — all asleep — not an old maid's sedan returning from a card-party; and if any old women got tipsy at christenings, they did not expose it in the streets.

See p. 93.

The side streets here are excessively maiden-lady like; the door-steps always fresh from the flannel. The knockers have a staid, serious, nay, almost awful quietness about them. I never saw so quiet a collection of lions' and rams' heads. The doors [are] most part black, with a little brass handle just above the keyhole, so that in Winchester a man may very quietly shut himself out of his own house.

How beautiful the season is now. How fine the air — a temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather — Dian skies. I never liked stubble-fields so much as now — aye, better than the chilly green of the Spring. Somehow, a stubble-field looks warm, in the same way that some pictures look warm. This struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it,*

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, &c.

* See the fine lines, "To Autumn," in the Poems.

I hope you are better employed than in gaping after weather. I have been at different times so happy as not to know what weather it was. No, I will not copy a parcel of verses. I always somehow associate Chatterton with Autumn. He is the purest writer in the English language. He has no French idiom or particles, like Chaucer; 'tis genuine English idiom in English words. I have given up "Hyperion,"—there were too many Miltonic inversions in it—Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful, or, rather, artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations. English ought to be kept up. It may be interesting to you to pick out some lines from "Hyperion," and put a mark, +, to the false beauty, proceeding from art, and 1, 2, to the true voice of feeling.^a Upon my soul, 'twas imagination; I cannot make the distinction—every now and then there is a Miltonic intonation—but I cannot make the division properly. The fact is, I must take a walk; for I am writing a long letter to George, and have been employed at it all the morning. You will ask, have I heard from George? I am sorry to say not the best news—I hope for better. This is the reason, among others, that if I write to you it must be in such a scrap-like way. I have no meridian to date interests from or measure circumstances. To-night I am all in a mist; I scarcely know what's what. But you, knowing my unsteady and vagarish disposition, will guess that all this turmoil will be settled by to-morrow morning. It strikes me to-night that I have led a very odd sort of life for the two or three last years—here and

^a This was probably the "Vision", with which he was not satisfied.—*Lord Houghton, Letter, p. 266 N.*

there, no anchor; I am glad of it. If you can get a peep at Babbicomb before you leave the country, do. I think it the finest place I have seen, or is to be seen, in the south. There is a cottage there I took warm water at, that made up for the tea. I have lately shirk'd some friends of ours, and I advise you to do the same. I mean the blue-devils—I am never at home to them. You need not fear them while you remain in Devonshire. There will be some of the family waiting for you at the coach-office—but go by another coach.

I shall beg leave to have a third opinion in the first discussion you have with Woodhouse—just half-way between both. You know I will not give up any argument. In my walk to-day, I stoop'd under a railing that lay across my path, and asked myself "why I did not get over." "Because," answered I, "no one wanted to force you under." I would give a guinea to be a reasonable man—good, sound sense—a says-what-he-thinks-and-does-what-he-says-man—and did not take snuff. They say men near death, however mad they may have been, come to their senses: I hope I shall here in this letter; there is a decent space to be very sensible in—many a good proverb has been in less—nay, I have heard of the statutes at large being changed into the statutes at small, and printed for a watch-paper.

Your sisters, by this time, must have got the Devonshire "ees"—short ees—you know 'em; they are the prettiest ees in the language. O, how I admire the middle-sized delicate Devonshire girls of about fifteen. There was one at an inn door

holding a quartern of brandy; the very thought of her kept me warm a whole stage—and a sixteen-miler too. “You’ll pardon me for being jocular.”

Ever your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 48.

TO MR. BROWN.

Sept. 23, 1819.

Now I am going to enter on the subject ~~itself~~ *of self*. It is quite time I should set myself doing something, and live no longer upon hopes. I have never yet exerted myself. I am getting into an idle-minded, vicious way of life, almost content to live upon others. In no period of my life have I acted with any self-will, but in throwing up the apothecary profession. That I do not repent of. Look at —; if he was not in the law he would be acquiring, by his abilities, something towards his support. My occupation is entirely literary: I will do so, too. I will write, on the liberal side of the question, for whoever will pay me. I have not known yet what it is to be diligent. I purpose living in town in a cheap lodging, and endeavouring, for a beginning, to get the theatricals of some paper. When I can afford to compose deliberate poems, I will. I shall be in expectation of an answer to this. Look on my side of the question. I am convinced I am right. Suppose the tragedy should succeed — there will be no harm done. And here I will take an opportunity of making a remark or two on our

friendship, and on all your good offices to me. I have a natural timidity of mind in these matters, liking better to take the feeling between us for granted than to speak of it. But, good God! what a short while you have known me! I feel it a sort of duty thus to recapitulate, however unpleasant it may be to you. You have been living for others more than any man I know. This is a vexation to me, because it has been depriving you, in the very prime of your life, of pleasures which it was your duty to procure. As I am speaking in general terms, this may appear nonsense; you, perhaps, will not understand it; but if you can go over, day by day, any month of the last year, you will know what I mean. On the whole, however, this a subject that I cannot express myself upon. I speculate upon it frequently; and, believe me, the end of my speculations is always an anxiety for your happiness. This anxiety will not be one of the least incitements to the plan I purpose pursuing. I had got into a habit of mind of looking towards you as a help in all difficulties. This very habit would be the parent of idleness and difficulties. You will see it is a duty I owe myself to break the neck of it. I do nothing for my subsistence—make no exertion. At the end of another year you shall applaud me, not for verses, but for conduct. While I have some immediate cash, I had better settle myself quietly, and fag on as others do. I shall apply to Hazlitt, who knows the market as well as any one, for something to bring me in a few pounds as soon as possible. I shall not suffer my pride to hinder me. The whisper may go round; I shall not hear it. If

I can get an article in the "Edinburgh," I will. One must not be delicate. Nor let this disturb you longer than a moment. I look forward with a good hope that we shall one day be passing free, untrammelled, unanxious time together. That can never be if I continue a dead lump. I shall be expecting anxiously an answer from you. If it does not arrive in a few days, this will have miscarried, and I shall come straight to — before I go to town, which you, I am sure, will agree had better be done while I still have some ready cash. By the middle of October I shall expect you in London. We will then sit at the theatres. If you have anything to gainsay, I shall be even as the deaf adder which stoppeth her ears.

(On the same day he wrote another letter, having received one from Mr. Brown in the interval. He again spoke of his purpose.)

Do not suffer me to disturb you unpleasantly: I do not mean that you should not suffer me to occupy your thoughts, but to occupy them pleasantly; for, I assure you, I am as far from being unhappy as possible. Imaginary grievances have always been more my torment than real ones. You know this well. Real ones will never have any other effect upon me than to stimulate me to get out of or avoid them. This is easily accounted for. Our imaginary woes are conjured up by our passions, and are fostered by passionate feeling: our real ones come themselves, and are opposed by an abstract exertion of mind. Real grievances are

displacers of passion. The imaginary nail a man down for a sufferer, as on a cross; the real spur him up into an agent. I wish, at one view, you would see my heart towards you. 'Tis only from a high tone of feeling that I can put that word upon paper — out of poetry. I ought to have waited for your answer to my last before I wrote you this. I felt, however, compelled to make a rejoinder to yours. I had written to — on the subject of my last; I scarcely know whether I shall send my letter now. I think he would approve of my plan,—it is so evident. Nay, I am convinced, out and out, that by prosing for a while in periodical works I may maintain myself decently.

No. 49.

WINCHESTER, Oct. 1st [1819].

MY DEAR DILKE :

For sundry reasons which I will explain to you when I come to town, I have to request you will do me a great favour, as I must call it, knowing how great a bore it is. That your imagination may not have time to take too great an alarm, I state immediately that I want you to hire me a couple of rooms (a sitting-room and bed-room for myself alone) in Westminster. Quietness and cheapness are the essentials; but as I shall, with Brown, be returned by next Friday, you cannot, in that space, have sufficient time to make any choice selection, and need not be very particular, as I can, when on

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the spot, suit myself at leisure. Brown bids me remind you not to send the "Examiners" after the third. Tell Mrs. D. I am obliged to her for the late ones, which I see are directed in her hand. Excuse this mere business-letter, for I assure you I have not a syllable at hand on any subject in the world.

Your sincere friend,
JOHN KEATS.

No. 50.

WENTWORTH PLACE, HAMPSTEAD,
17th Nov. [1819].

MY DEAR TAYLOR :

I have come to a determination not to publish anything I have now ready written ; but, for all that, to publish a poem before long, and that I hope to make a fine one. As the marvelous is the most enticing, and the surest guarantee of harmonious numbers, I have been endeavouring to persuade myself to untether Fancy, and to let her manage for herself. I and myself cannot agree about this at all. Wonders are no wonders to me. I am more at home amongst men and women. I would rather read Chaucer and Ariosto. The little dramatic skill I may as yet have, however badly it might show in a drama, would, I think, be sufficient for a poem. I wish to diffuse the colouring of " St. Agnes' Eve " throughout a poem in which character and sentiment would be the figures to such drapery. Two or three such poems, if God should spare me,

written in the course of the next six years, would be a famous *Gradus ad Parnassum altissimum*. I mean they would nerve me up to the writing of a few fine plays — my greatest ambition, when I do feel ambitious. I am sorry to say that is very seldom. The subject we have once or twice talked of appears a promising one—the Earl of Leicester's history. I am this morning reading Holingshed's "Elizabeth." You had some books awhile ago you promised to send me, illustrative of my subject. If you can lay hold of them, or any other which may be serviceable to me, I know you will encourage my low-spirited muse by sending them, or rather by letting me know where our errand-cart man shall call with my little box. I will endeavour to set myself selfishly at work on this poem that is to be.

Your sincere friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 51.

WENTWORTH PLACE, Feb. 16, 1820.

MY DEAR RICE:

I have not been well enough to make any tolerable rejoinder to your kind letter. I will, as you advise, be very chary of my health and spirits. I am sorry to hear of your relapse and hypochondriac symptoms attending it. Let us hope for the best, as you say. I shall follow your example in looking to the future good rather than brooding upon the present ill. I have not been so worn with lengthened ill-

nesses as you have, therefore cannot answer you on your own ground with respect to those haunting and deformed thoughts and feelings you speak of. When I have been, or supposed myself, in health, I have had my share of them, especially within the last year. I may say, that for six months before I was taken ill I had not passed a tranquil day. Either that gloom overspread me, or I was suffering under some passionate feeling, or if I turned to versify, that acerbated the poison of either sensation. The beauties of nature had lost their power over me. How astonishingly (here I must premise that illness, as far as I can judge in so short a time, has relieved my mind of a load of deceptive thoughts and images, and makes me perceive things in a truer light)—how astonishingly does the chance of leaving the world impress a sense of its natural beauties upon us! Like poor Falstaff, though I do not “babble,” I think of green fields; I muse with the greatest affection on every flower I have known from my infancy—their shapes and colours are as new to me as if I had just created them with a superhuman fancy. It is because they are connected with the most thoughtless and the happiest moments of our lives. I have seen foreign flowers in hot-houses, of the most beautiful nature, but I do not care a straw for them. The simple flowers of our Spring are what I want to see again.

Brown has left the inventive and taken to the imitative art. He is doing his forte, which is copying Hogarth's heads. He has just made a purchase of the Methodist Meeting picture, which gave me a horrid dream a few nights ago. I hope I shall sit

under the trees with you again in some such place as the Isle of Wight. I do not mind a game of cards in a saw-pit or wagon, but if ever you catch me on a stage-coach in the winter, full against the wind, bring me down with a brace of bullets, and I promise not to 'peach. Remember me to Reynolds, and say how much I should like to hear from him; that Brown returned immediately after he went on Sunday, and that I was vexed at forgetting to ask him to lunch; for as he went towards the gate I saw he was fatigued and hungry.

I am, my dear Rice,

Ever most sincerely yours,

JOHN KEATS.

I have broken this open to let you know I was surprised at seeing it on the table this morning, thinking it had gone long ago.

No. 52.

[Post-mark, HAMPSTEAD, March 4, 1820.]

MY DEAR DILKE:

Since I saw you I have been gradually, too gradually perhaps, improving; and, though under an interdict with respect to animal food, living upon pseudo-victuals, Brown says I have picked up a little flesh lately. If I can keep off inflammation for the next six weeks, I trust I shall do very well. Reynolds is going to sail on the salt seas. Brown has been mightily progressing with his Hogarth.

A damn'd melancholy picture it is, and during the first week of my illness it gave me a psalm-singing nightmare that made me almost faint away in my sleep. I know I am better, for I can bear the picture. I have experienced a specimen of great politeness from Mr. Barry Cornwall. He has sent me his books. Some time ago he had given his published book to Hunt, for me; Hunt forgot to give it, and Barry Cornwall, thinking I had received it, must have thought me a very neglectful fellow. Notwithstanding, he sent me his second book, and on my explaining that I had not received his first, he sent me that also. I shall not expect Mrs. Dilke at Hampstead next week unless the weather changes for the warmer. It is better to run no chance of a supernumerary cold in March. As for you, you must come. You must improve in your penmanship; your writing is like the speaking of a child of three years old—very understandable to its father, but to no one else. The worst is, it looks well—no, that is not the worst—the worst is, it is worse than Bailey's. Bailey's looks illegible, and may perchance be read; yours looks very legible, and may perchance not be read. I would endeavour to give you a fac-simile of your word "Thistlewood" if I were not minded on the instant that Lord Chesterfield has done some such thing to his son. Now I would not bathe in the same river with Lord C., though I had the upper hand of the stream. I am grieved that in writing and speaking it is necessary to make use of the same particles as he did. Cobbett is expected to come in. O! that I had two double plumpers for him. The ministry

is not so inimical to him, but it would like to put him into Coventry. Casting my eye on the other side, I see a long word written in a most vile manner, unbecoming a critic. You must recollect I have served no apprenticeship to old plays. If the only copies of the Greek and Latin authors had been made by you, Bailey, and Haydon, they were as good as lost. It has been said that the character of a man may be known by his handwriting; if the character of the age may be known by the average goodness of ours, what a slovenly age we live in. Look at Queen Elizabeth's Latin exercises and blush. Look at Milton's hand: I can't say a word for Shakspeare.

Your sincere friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 53.

MY DEAR DILKE:

As Brown is not to be a fixture at Hampstead, I have at last made up my mind to send home all lent books. I should have seen you before this, but my mind has been at work all over the world to find out what to do. I have my choice of three things, or, at least, two,—South America, or surgeon to an Indiaman; which last, I think, will be my fate. I shall resolve in a few days. Remember me to Mrs. D. and Charles, and your father and mother.

Ever truly yours,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 54.

June 11, [1822]

MY DEAR TAYLOR :

In reading over the proof of "St. Agnes' Eve" since I left Fleet street, I was struck with what appears to me an alteration in the seventh stanza, very much for the worse. The passage I mean stands thus :

her maiden eyes incline
Still on the floor, while many a sweeping train
Pass by.

'Twas originally written

her maiden eyes divine
Fix'd on the floor, saw many a sweeping train
Pass by.

My meaning is quite destroyed in the alteration. I do not use *train* for *concourse of passers by*, but for *skirts* sweeping along the floor.

In the first stanza, my copy reads, second line,

bitter *chill* it was,

to avoid the echo cold in the second line.

Ever yours sincerely,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 55.

MY DEAR BROWN :

I have only been to ——'s once since you left, when —— could not find your letters. Now this is bad of me. I should, in this instance, conquer

the great aversion to breaking up my regular habits, which grows upon me more and more. True, I have an excuse in the weather, which drives one from shelter to shelter in any little excursion. I have not heard from George. My book² is coming out with very low hopes, though not spirits, on my part. This shall be my last trial; not succeeding, I shall try what I can do in the apothecary line. When you hear from or see —, it is probable you will hear some complaints against me, which this notice is not intended to forestall. The fact is, I did behave badly; but it is to be attributed to my health, spirits, and the disadvantageous ground I stand on in society. I could go and accommodate matters if I were not too weary of the world. I know that they are more happy and comfortable than I am; therefore why should I trouble myself about it? I foresee I shall know very few people in the course of a year or two. Men get such different habits that they become as oil and vinegar to one another. Thus far I have a consciousness of having been pretty dull and heavy, both in subject and phrase; I might add, enigmatical. I am in the wrong, and the world is in the right, I have no doubt. Fact is, I have had so many kindnesses done me by so many people, that I am cheveaux-de-frised with benefits, which I must jump over or break down. I met — in town a few days ago, who invited me to supper to meet Wordsworth, Southey, Lamb, Haydon, and some more; I was too careful of my health to risk being out at night.

² "Lamia, Isabella, and other Poems."

Talking of that, I continue to improve slowly, but, I think, surely. There is a famous exhibition in Pall Mall of old English portraits by Vandyck and Holbein, Sir Peter Lely, and the great Sir Godfrey. Pleasant countenances predominate; so I will mention two or three unpleasant ones. There is James the First, whose appearance would disgrace a "Society for the Suppression of Women"; so very squalid and subdued to nothing he looks. Then, there is old Lord Burleigh, the high-priest of economy, the political save-all, who has the appearance of a Pharisee just rebuffed by a Gospel *bon-mot*. Then there is George the Second, very like an un-intellectual Voltaire, troubled with the gout and a bad temper. Then there is young Devereux, the favourite, with every appearance of as slang a boxer as any in the Court; his face is cast in the mould of blackguardism with jockey-plaster. I shall soon begin upon "Lucy Vaughan Lloyd." I do not begin composition yet, being willing, in case of a relapse, to have nothing to reproach myself with. I hope the weather will give you the slip; let it show itself and steal out of your company. When I have sent off this, I shall write another to some place about fifty miles in advance of you.

Good morning to you.

Yours ever sincerely,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 56.

MY DEAR BROWN:

You may not have heard from —, or —, or in any way, that an attack of spitting of blood, and all its weakening consequences, has prevented me

from writing for so long a time. I have matter now for a very long letter, but not news; so I must cut everything short. I shall make some confession, which you will be the only person, for many reasons, I shall trust with. A winter in England would, I have not a doubt, kill me; so I have resolved to go to Italy, either by sea or land. Not that I have any great hopes of that, for I think there is a core of disease in me not easy to pull out. I shall be obliged to set off in less than a month. Do not, my dear Brown, tease yourself about me. You must fill up your time as well as you can and as happily. You must think of my faults as lightly as you can. When I have health I will bring up the long arrears of letters I owe you. My book has had good success among the literary people and I believe has a moderate sale. I have seen very few people we know. — has visited me more than any one. I would go to — and make some inquiries after you, if I could with any bearable sensation; but a person I am not quite used to causes an oppression on my chest. Last week I received a letter from Shelley, at Pisa, of a very kind nature, asking me to pass the winter with him. Hunt has behaved very kindly to me. You shall hear from me again shortly. Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 57.

HAMPSTEAD, Mrs. —'s, Wentworth Place.

MY DEAR HAYDON:

I am much better this morning than I was when I wrote you the note; that is, my hopes and spirits

are better, which are generally at a very low ebb, from such a protracted illness. I shall be here for a little time, and at home all every day. A journey to Italy is recommended me, which I have resolved upon, and am beginning to prepare for. Hoping to see you shortly,

I remain your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 58.

WENTWORTH PLACE [14th August, 1820].

MY DEAR TAYLOR:

My chest is in such a nervous state that anything extra, such as speaking to an unaccustomed person, or writing a note, half suffocates me. This journey to Italy wakes me at daylight every morning and haunts me horribly. I shall endeavour to go, though it be with the sensation of marching up against a battery. The first step towards it is to know the expense of a journey and a year's residence, which if you will ascertain for me, and let me know early, you will greatly serve me. I have more to say, but must desist, for every line I write increases the tightness of my chest, and I have many more to do. I am convinced that this sort of thing does not continue for nothing. If you can come, with any of our friends, do.

Your sincere friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 59.

MY DEAR BROWN :

I ought to be off at the end of this week, as the cold winds begin to blow towards evening ; but I will wait till I have your answer to this. I am to be introduced, before I set out, to a Dr. Clark, a physician settled at Rome, who promises to befriend me in every way there. The sale of my book is very slow, though it has been very highly rated. One of the causes, I understand from different quarters, of the unpopularity of this new book is the offence the ladies take at me. On thinking that matter over, I am certain that I have said nothing in a spirit to displease any woman I would care to please ; but still there is a tendency to class women in my books with roses and sweetmeats,—they never see themselves dominant. I will say no more, but, waiting in anxiety for your answer, doff my hat, and make a purse as long as I can.

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 60.

MARIA CROWTHER,
OFF YARMOUTH, ISLE OF WIGHT,
Sept. 28, 1820.

MY DEAR BROWN :

The time has not yet come for a pleasant letter from me. I have delayed writing to you from time

to time, because I felt how impossible it was to enliven you with one heartening hope of my recovery. This morning, in bed, the matter struck me in a different manner; I thought I would write "while I was in some liking," or I might become too ill to write at all; and then, if the desire to have written should become strong, it would be a great affliction to me. I have many more letters to write, and I bless my stars that I have begun, for time seems to press. This may be my best opportunity. We are in a calm, and I am easy enough this morning. If my spirits seem too low you may in some degree impute it to our having been at sea a fortnight without making any way. I was very disappointed at Bedhampton, and was much provoked at the thought of your being at Chichester to-day. I should have delighted in setting off for London for the sensation merely, for what should I do there? I could not leave my lungs or stomach, or other worse things, behind me. I wish to write on subjects that will not agitate me much. There is one I must mention and have done with it. Even if my body would recover of itself, this would prevent it. The very thing which I want to live most for will be a great occasion of my death. I cannot help it. Who can help it? Were I in health it would make me ill, and how can I bear it in my state? I dare say you will be able to guess on what subject I am harping — you know what was my greatest pain during the first part of my illness at your house. I wish for death every day and night to deliver me from these pains, and then I wish death away, for death would destroy even

those pains, which are better than nothing. Land and sea, weakness and decline, are great separators, but Death is the great divorcer for ever. When the pang of this thought has passed through my mind, I may say the bitterness of death is passed. I often wish for you, that you might flatter me with the best. I think, without my mentioning it, for my sake, you would be a friend to Miss —— when I am dead. You think she has many faults, but for my sake think she has not one. If there is anything you can do for her by word or deed I know you will do it. I am in a state at present in which woman, merely as woman, can have no more power over me than stocks and stones, and yet the difference of my sensations with respect to Miss —— and my sister is amazing—the one seems to absorb the other to a degree incredible. I seldom think of my brother and sister in America; the thought of leaving Miss —— is beyond everything horrible—the sense of darkness coming over me—I eternally see her figure eternally vanishing; some of the phrases she was in the habit of using during my last nursing at Wentworth Place ring in my ears. Is there another life? Shall I awake and find all this a dream? There must be, we cannot be created for this sort of suffering. The receiving this letter is to be one of yours—I will say nothing about our friendship, or rather yours to me, more than that, as you deserve to escape, you will never be so unhappy as I am. I should think of you in my last moments. I shall endeavour to write to Miss ——, if possible, to-day. A sudden stop to my life in the middle of one of these letters

would be no bad thing, for it keeps one in a sort of fever awhile; though fatigued with a letter longer than any I have written for a long while, it would be better to go on for ever than awake to a sense of contrary winds. We expect to put into Portland Roads to-night. The captain, the crew, and the passengers are all ill-tempered and weary. I shall write to Dilke. I feel as if I was closing my last letter to you, my dear Brown.

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 61.

NAPLES, NOV. 1 [1820].

MY DEAR BROWN:

Yesterday we were let out of quarantine, during which my health suffered more from bad air and the stifled cabin than it had done the whole voyage. The fresh air revived me a little, and I hope I am well enough this morning to write to you a short, calm letter; if that can be called one, in which I am afraid to speak of what I would fainest dwell upon. As I have gone thus far into it, I must go on a little; perhaps it may relieve the load of *wretchedness* which presses upon me. The persuasion that I shall see her no more will kill me. My dear Brown, I should have had her when I was in health, and I should have remained well. I can bear to die—I cannot bear to leave her. Oh, God! God! God! Everything I have in my trunks that reminds me of her goes through me like a spear.

The silk lining she put in my traveling cap scalds my head. My imagination is horribly vivid about her—I see her—I hear her. There is nothing in the world of sufficient interest to divert me from her a moment. This was the case when I was in England; I cannot recollect, without shuddering, the time that I was a prisoner at Hunt's, and used to keep my eyes fixed on Hampstead all day. Then there was a good hope of seeing her again—Now!—O that I could be buried near where she lives! I am afraid to write to her—to receive a letter from her—to see her handwriting would break my heart—even to hear of her anyhow, to see her name written, would be more than I can bear. 'My dear Brown, what am I to do? Where can I look for consolation or ease? If I had any chance of recovery, this passion would kill me. Indeed, through the whole of my illness, both at your house and at Kentish Town, this fever has never ceased wearing me out. When you write to me, which you will do immediately, write to Rome (*poste restante*)—if she is well and happy, put a mark thus +; if —

Remember me to all. I will endeavour to bear my miseries patiently. A person in my state of health should not have such miseries to bear. Write a short note to my sister, saying you have heard from me. Severn is very well. If I were in better health I would urge your coming to Rome. I fear there is no one can give me any comfort. Is there any news of George? O, that something fortunate had ever happened to me or my brothers!—then I might hope,—but despair is forced upon me as a

habit. My dear Brown, for my sake, be her advocate for ever. I cannot say a word about Naples; I do not feel at all concerned in the thousand novelties around me. I am afraid to write to her. I should like her to know that I do not forget her. Oh, Brown, I have coals of fire in my breast. It surprises me that the human heart is capable of containing and bearing so much misery. Was I born for this end? God bless her, and her mother, and my sister, and George, and his wife, and you, and all!

Your ever affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

Thursday.—I was a day too early for the courier. He sets out now. I have been more calm to-day, though in a half dread of not continuing so. I said nothing of my health; I know nothing of it; you will hear Severn's account, from ——. I must leave off. You bring my thoughts too near to ——. God bless you!

No. 62.

ROME, 30th November, 1820.

MY DEAR BROWN:

'Tis the most difficult thing in the world to me to write a letter. My stomach continues so bad, that I feel it worse on opening any book,—yet I am much better than I was in quarantine. Then I am afraid to encounter the pro-ing and con-ing of anything interesting to me in England. I have an habitual feeling of my real life having passed, and that

I am leading a posthumous existence. God knows how it would have been—but it appears to me—however, I will not speak of that subject. I must have been at Bedhampton nearly at the time you were writing to me from Chichester—how unfortunate—and to pass on the river too! There was my star predominant! I cannot answer anything in your letter, which followed me from Naples to Rome, because I am afraid to look it over again. I am so weak (in mind) that I cannot bear the sight of any handwriting of a friend I love so much as I do you. Yet I ride the little horse, and, at my worst, even in quarantine, summoned up more puns, in a sort of desperation, in one week than in any year of my life. There is one thought enough to kill me; I have been well, healthy, alert, &c., walking with her, and now—the knowledge of contrast, feeling for light and shade, all that information (primitive sense) necessary for a poem, are great enemies to the recovery of the stomach. There, you rogue, I put you to the torture; but you must bring your philosophy to bear, as I do mine, really, or how should I be able to live? Dr. Clark is very attentive to me; he says there is very little the matter with my lungs, but my stomach, he says, is very bad. I am well disappointed in hearing good news from George, for it runs in my head we shall all die young. I have not written to Reynolds yet, which he must think very neglectful; being anxious to send him a good account of my health, I have delayed it from week to week. If I recover, I will do all in my power to correct the mistakes made during sickness; and if I should not, all my faults will be

forgiven. Severn is very well, though he leads so dull a life with me. Remember me to all friends, and tell Haslam I should not have left London without taking leave of him, but from being so low in body and mind. Write to George as soon as you receive this, and tell him how I am, as far as you can guess: and also a note to my sister—who walks about my imagination like a ghost—she is so like Tom. I can scarcely bid you good-bye, even in a letter. I always made an awkward bow.

God bless you!

JOHN KEATS.





FANNY BRAWNE



LETTERS TO FANNY BRAWNE

No. 1.

SHANKLIN, ISLE OF WIGHT, THURSDAY.

[Postmark, Newport, 3 July, 1819.]

MY DEAREST LADY:

I am glad I had not an opportunity of sending off a letter which I wrote for you on Tuesday night —'twas too much like one out of Rousseau's "Heloise." I am more reasonable this morning. The morning is the only proper time for me to write to a beautiful girl whom I love so much: for at night, when the lonely day has closed, and the lonely, silent, unmusical chamber is waiting to receive me as into a sepulchre, then believe me my passion gets entirely the sway, then I would not have you see those rhapsodies which I once thought it impossible I should ever give way to, and which I have often laughed at in another, for fear you should [think me] either too unhappy or perhaps

a little mad. I am now at a very pleasant cottage window, looking onto a beautiful hilly country, with a glimpse of the sea; the morning is very fine. I do not know how elastic my spirit might be, what pleasure I might have in living here and breathing and wandering as free as a stag about this beautiful coast if the remembrance of you did not weigh so upon me. I have never known any unalloy'd happiness for many days together: the death or sickness of some one has always spoilt my hours—and now, when none such troubles oppress me, it is, you must confess, very hard that another sort of pain should haunt me. Ask yourself, my love, whether you are not very cruel to have so entrammelled me, so destroyed my freedom. Will you confess this in the letter you must write immediately? and do all you can to console me in it—make it rich as a draught of poppies to intoxicate me—write the softest words and kiss them, that I may at least touch my lips where yours have been. For myself I know not how to express my devotion to so fair a form: I want a brighter word than bright, a fairer word than fair. I almost wish we were butterflies and liv'd but three summer days—three such days with you I could fill with more delight than fifty common years could ever contain. But however selfish I may feel, I am sure I could never act selfishly: as I told you a day or two before I left Hampstead, I will never return to London if my fate does not turn up Pam, or at least a Court-card. Though I could centre my happiness in you, I cannot expect to engross your heart so entirely—indeed, if I thought you felt as much for me as I

do for you at this moment, I do not think I could restrain myself from seeing you again to-morrow for the delight of one embrace. But no—I must live upon hope and chance. In case of the worst that can happen, I shall still love you—but what hatred shall I have for another! Some lines I read the other day are continually ringing a peal in my ears :

To see those eyes I prize above mine own
Dart favours on another —
And those sweet lips (yielding immortal nectar)
Be gently press'd by any but myself—
Think, think Francesca, what a cursed thing
It were beyond expression !

J.

Do write immediately. There is no post from this place, so you must address Post-office, Newport, Isle of Wight. I know before night I shall curse myself for having sent you so cold a letter; yet it is better to do it as much in my senses as possible. Be as kind as the distance will permit to your

J. KEATS.

Present my compliments to your mother, my love to Margaret, and best remembrances to your brother—if you please so.

No. 2.

July 8th.

[Postmark, Newport, 10 July, 1819.]

MY SWEET GIRL :

Your letter gave me more delight than anything in the world but yourself could do; indeed I am

almost astonished that any absent one should have that luxurious power over my senses which I feel. Even when I am not thinking of you I receive your influence and a tenderer nature stealing upon me. All my thoughts, my unhappiest days and nights, have, I find, not at all cured me of my love of beauty, but made it so intense that I am miserable that you are not with me: or rather breathe in that dull sort of patience that cannot be called Life. I never knew before, what such a love as you have made me feel, was; I did not believe in it; my fancy was afraid of it, lest it should burn me up. But if you will fully love me, though there may be some fire, 'twill not be more than we can bear when moistened and bedewed with pleasures. You mention "horrid people," and ask me whether it depend upon them whether I see you again. Do understand me, my love, in this. I have so much of you in my heart that I must turn mentor when I see a chance of harm befalling you. I would never see anything but pleasure in your eyes, love on your lips, and happiness in your steps. I would wish to see you among those amusements suitable to your inclinations and spirits; so that our loves might be a delight in the midst of pleasures agreeable enough, rather than a resource from vexations and cares. But I doubt much, in case of the worst, whether I shall be philosopher enough to follow my own lessons: if I saw my resolution give you a pain, I could not. Why may I not speak of your beauty, since without that I could never have lov'd you?—I cannot conceive any beginning of such love as I

have for you but beauty. There may be a sort of love for which, without the least sneer at it, I have the highest respect and can admire it in others: but it has not the richness, the bloom, the full form, the enchantment of love after my own heart. So let me speak of your beauty, though to my own endangering; if you could be so cruel to me as to try elsewhere its power. You say you are afraid I shall think you do not love me—in saying this you make me ache the more to be near you. I am at the diligent use of my faculties here; I do not pass a day without sprawling some blank verse or tagging some rhymes; and here I must confess that (since I am on that subject) I love you the more in that I believe you have liked me for my own sake and for nothing else. I have met with women whom I really think would like to be married to a poem, and to be given away by a novel. I have seen your comet, and only wish it was a sign that poor Rice would get well, whose illness makes him rather a melancholy companion: and the more so as so to conquer his feelings and hide them from me, with a forc'd pun. I kiss'd your writing over in the hope you had indulg'd me by leaving a trace of honey. What was your dream? Tell it me and I will tell you the interpretation thereof.

Ever yours, my love!

JOHN KEATS.

Do not accuse me of delay—we have not here an opportunity of sending letters every day. Write speedily.

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No. 3.

SUNDAY NIGHT. [Postmark, 27 July, 1819.]

MY SWEET GIRL:

I hope you did not blame me much for not obeying your request of a letter on Saturday: we have had four in our small room playing at cards night and morning, leaving me no undisturb'd opportunity to write. Now Rice and Martin are gone I am at liberty. Brown, to my sorrow, confirms the account you give of your ill health. You cannot conceive how I ache to be with you: how I would die for one hour—— for what is in the world? I say you cannot conceive; it is impossible you should look with such eyes upon me as I have upon you: it cannot be. Forgive me if I wander a little this evening, for I have been all day employ'd in a very abstract poem, and I am in deep love with you—two things which must excuse me. I have, believe me, not been an age in letting you take possession of me; the very first week I knew you I wrote myself your vassal; but burnt the letter, as the very next time I saw you I thought you manifested some dislike to me. If you should ever feel for man at the first sight what I did for you, I am lost. Yet I should not quarrel with you, but hate myself if such a thing were to happen—only I should burst if the thing were not as fine as a man as you are as a woman. Perhaps I am too vehement; then fancy me on my knees, especially when I mention a part

of your letter which hurt me. You say, speaking of Mr. Severn, "but you must be satisfied in knowing that I admired you much more than your friend." My dear love, I cannot believe there ever was or ever could be anything to admire in me, especially as far as sight goes—I cannot be admired, I am not a thing to be admired. You are, I love you; all I can bring you is a swooning admiration of your beauty. I hold that place among men which snub-nos'd brunettes with meeting eyebrows do among women—they are trash to me—unless I should find one among them with a fire in her heart like the one that burns in mine. You absorb me in spite of myself—you alone: for I look not forward with any pleasure to what is call'd being settled in the world; I tremble at domestic cares—yet for you I would meet them, though if it would leave you the happier I would rather die than do so. I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks,—your loveliness and the hour of my death. O that I could have possession of them both in the same minute. I hate the world: it batters too much the wings of my self-will, and would I could take a sweet poison from your lips to send me out of it. From no others would I take it. I am indeed astonish'd to find myself so careless of all charms but yours—remembering as I do the time when even a bit of ribband was a matter of interest with me. What softer words can I find for you after this?—what it is I will not read. Nor will I say more here, but in a postscript answer anything else you may have mentioned in your letter in so many words—for I am distracted with a thousand thoughts. I will

imagine you Venus to-night and pray, pray, pray
to your star like a heathen.

Yours ever, fair star,

JOHN KEATS.

My seal is mark'd like a family table-cloth, with my mother's initial F for Fanny put between my father's initials. You will soon hear from me again. My respectful compliments to your mother. Tell Margaret I'll send her a reef of best rocks; and tell Sam I will give him my light bay hunter if he will tie the Bishop hand and foot and pack him in a hamper and send him down for me to bathe him for his health with a necklace of good snubby stones about his neck.

No. 4.

SHANKLIN, THURSDAY NIGHT.

[Postmark, Newport, 9 August, 1819.]

MY DEAR GIRL:

You say you must not have any more such letters as the last: I'll try that you shall not, by running obstinate the other way. Indeed, I have not fair play—I am not idle enough for proper downright love-letters—I leave this minute a scene in our tragedy and see you (think it not blasphemy) through the mist of plots, speeches, counterplots, and counterspeeches. The lover is madder than I am—I am nothing to him—he has a figure like the statue of Meleager, and double distilled fire in his heart. Thank God for my diligence! were it not for that I should be miserable. I encourage it,

and strive not to think of you—but when I have succeeded in doing so all day and as far as midnight, you return, as soon as this artificial excitement goes off, more severely from the fever I am left in. Upon my soul, I cannot say what you could like me for. I do not think myself a fright any more than I do Mr. A., Mr. B., and Mr. C.—yet if I were a woman I should not like A. B. C. But enough of this. So you intend to hold me to my promise of seeing you in a short time. I shall keep it with as much sorrow as gladness: for I am not one of the Paladins of old who liv'd upon water grass and smiles for years together. What thought would I not give to-night for the gratification of my eyes alone? This day week we shall move to Winchester; for I feel the want of a library. Brown will leave me there to pay a visit to Mr. Snook at Bedhampton: in his absence I will flit to you and back. I will stay very little while, for as I am in a train of writing now I fear to disturb it—let it have its course, bad or good—in it I shall try my own strength and the public pulse. At Winchester I shall get your letters more readily; and it being a cathedral city I shall have a pleasure, always a great one to me when near a cathedral, of reading them during the service up and down the aisle.

Friday Morning.—Just as I had written thus far last night, Brown came down in his morning coat and night-cap, saying he had been refresh'd by a good sleep and was very hungry. I left him eating and went to bed, being too tired to enter into any discussions. You would delight very greatly in the walks about here; the cliffs, woods, hills, sands,

rocks, &c., about here. They are, however, not so fine but I shall give them a hearty good-bye to exchange them for my cathedral. Yet again I am not so tired of scenery as to hate Switzerland. We might spend a pleasant year at Berne or Zurich — if it should please Venus to hear my “Beseech thee to hear us, O Goddess.” And if she should hear, God forbid we should what people call *settle* — turn into a pond, a stagnant Lethe — a vile crescent, row, or buildings. Better be imprudent moveables than prudent fixtures. Open my mouth at the street door like the lion’s head at Venice to receive hateful cards, letters, messages. Go out and wither at tea parties; freeze at dinners; bake at dances; simmer at routs. No, my love, trust yourself to me and I will find you nobler amusements, fortune favouring. I fear you will not receive this till Sunday or Monday: as the Irishman would write, do not in the meanwhile hate me. I long to be off for Winchester, for I begin to dislike the very door-posts here — the names, the pebbles. You ask after my health, not telling me whether you are better. I am quite well. You going out is no proof that you are: how is it? Late hours will do you great harm. What fairing is it? I was alone for a couple of days while Brown went gadding over the country with his ancient knapsack. Now I like his society as well as any man’s, yet regretted his return — it broke in upon me like a thunderbolt. I had got in a dream among my books — really luxuriating in a solitude and silence you alone should have disturb’d.

Your ever affectionate,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 5.

WINCHESTER, August 17th.

[Postmark, 16 August, 1819.]

MY DEAR GIRL :

What shall I say for myself? I have been here four days and not yet written you—'tis true I have had many teasing letters of business to dismiss—and I have been in the claws, like a serpent in an eagle's, of the last act of our tragedy. This is no excuse; I know it; I do not presume to offer it. I have no right either to ask a speedy answer to let me know how lenient you are—I must remain some days in a mist—I see you through a mist: as I dare say you do me by this time. Believe in the first letters I wrote you: I assure you I felt as I wrote—I could not write so now. The thousand images I have had pass through my brain—my uneasy spirits—my unguess'd fate—all spread as a veil between me and you. Remember, I have had no idle leisure to brood over you—'tis well perhaps I have not. I could not have endured the throng of jealousies that used to haunt me before I had plunged so deeply into imaginary interests. I would fain, as my sails are set, sail on without an interruption for a brace of months longer—I am in complete cue—in the fever; and shall in these four months do an immense deal. This page, as my eye skims over it, I see is excessively unlover-like and ungallant—I cannot help it—I am no officer in yawning quarters; no Parson-Romeo. My mind is heap'd to the full; stuff'd like a cricket

ball—if I strive to fill it more it would burst. I know the generality of women would hate me for this; that I should have so unsoften'd, so hard a mind as to forget them; forget the brightest realities for the dull imaginations of my own brain. But I conjure you to give it a fair thinking, and ask yourself whether 'tis not better to explain my feelings to you than write artificial passion. Besides, you would see through it. It would be vain to strive to deceive you. 'Tis harsh, harsh, I know it. My heart seems now made of iron—I could not write a proper answer to an invitation to Idalia. You are my judge: my forehead is on the ground. You seem offended at a little simple innocent childish playfulness in my last. I did not seriously mean to say that you were endeavouring to make me keep my promise. I beg your pardon for it. 'Tis but *just* your pride should take the alarm—*seriously*. You say I may do as I please—I do not think with any conscience I can; my cash resources are for the present stopp'd; I fear for some time. I spend no money, but it increases my debts. I have all my life thought very little of these matters—they seem not to belong to me. It may be a proud sentence, but by Heaven I am as entirely above all matters of interest as the sun is above the earth—and though of my own money I should be careless, of my friends' I must be spare. You see how I go on—like so many strokes of a hammer. I cannot help it—I am impell'd, driven to it. I am not happy enough for silken phrases and silver sentences. I can no more use soothing words to you than if I

were at this moment engaged in a charge of cavalry. Then you will say I should not write at all. Should I not? This Winchester is a fine place: a beautiful cathedral, and many other ancient buildings in the environs. The little coffin of a room at Shanklin is changed for a large room, where I can promenade at my pleasure—looks out onto a beautiful—blank side of a house. It is strange I should like it better than the view of the sea from our window at Shanklin. I began to hate the very posts there—the voice of the old lady over the way was getting a great plague. The fisherman's face never altered any more than our black tea-pot—the knob, however, was knock'd off to my little relief. I am getting a great dislike of the picturesque, and can only relish it over again by seeing you enjoy it. One of the pleasantest things I have seen lately was at Cowes. The Regent in his yacht (I think they spell it) was anchored opposite—a beautiful vessel—and all the yachts and boats on the coast were passing and repassing it, and circuiting and tacking about it in every direction—I never beheld anything so silent, light, and graceful. As we pass'd over to Southampton there was nearly an accident. There came by a boat well mann'd, with two naval officers at the stern. Our bow-lines took the top of their little mast and snapped it off close by the board. Had the mast been a little stouter they would have been upset. In so trifling an event I could not help admiring our seamen—neither officer nor man in the whole boat moved a muscle—they scarcely notic'd it even with words. Forgive me for this

flint-worded letter, and believe and see that I cannot think of you without some sort of energy—though *mal à propos*. Even as I leave off it seems to me that a few more moments' thought of you would uncrystallize and dissolve me. I must not give way to it—but turn to my writing again—if I fail I shall die hard. O my love, your lips are growing sweet again to my fancy—I must forget them. Ever your affectionate

KEATS.

No. 6.

FLEET STREET, Monday Morn.

[Postmark, Lombard Street, 14 September, 1819.]

MY DEAR GIRL :

I have been hurried to town by a letter from my brother George; it is not of the brightest intelligence. Am I mad or not? I came by the Friday night coach, and have not yet been to Hampstead. Upon my soul it is not my fault. I cannot resolve to mix any pleasure with my days: they go one like another, undistinguishable. If I were to see you to-day it would destroy the half comfortable sullenness I enjoy at present into downright perplexities. I love you too much to venture to Hampstead; I feel it is not paying a visit, but venturing into a fire. *Que feraije ?* as the French novel writers say in fun, and I in earnest: really what can I do? Knowing well that my life must be passed in fatigue and trouble, I have been endeav-

ouring to wean myself from you : for to myself alone what can be much of a misery ? As far as they regard myself I can despise all events : but I cannot cease to love you. This morning I scarcely know what I am doing. I am going to Walthamstow. I shall return to Winchester to-morrow, whence you shall hear from me in a few days. I am a coward ; I cannot bear the pain of being happy : 'tis out of the question : I must admit no thought of it.

Yours ever affectionately,
JOHN KEATS.

No. 7.

COLLEGE STREET.

[Postmark, 11 October, 1819.]

MY SWEET GIRL:

I am living to-day in yesterday : I was in a complete fascination all day. I feel myself at your mercy. Write me ever so few lines, and tell me you will never for ever be less kind to me than yesterday. You dazzled me. There is nothing in the world so bright and delicate. When Brown came out with that seemingly true story against me last night, I felt it would be death to me if you had ever believed it—though against any one else I could muster up my obstinacy. Before I knew Brown could disprove it I was for the moment miserable. When shall we pass a day alone ? I have had a thousand kisses, for which with my whole soul I thank love ; but if you should deny me the thou-

sand and first, 'twould put me to the proof how great a misery I could live through. If you should ever carry your threat yesterday into execution, believe me 'tis not my pride, my vanity, or any petty passion would torment me; really 'twould hurt my heart—I could not bear it. I have seen Mrs. Dilke this morning; she says she will come with me any fine day.

Ever yours,

JOHN KEATS.

Ah hertè mine!

No. 8.

25 COLLEGE STREET.

[Postmark, 13 October, 1819.]

MY DEAREST GIRL:

This moment I have set myself to copy some verses out fair. I cannot proceed with any degree of content. I must write you a line or two, and see if that will assist in dismissing you from my mind, for ever so short a time. Upon my soul I can think of nothing else. The time is passed when I had power to advise and warn you against the unpromising morning of my life. My love has made me selfish. I cannot exist without you. I am forgetful of everything but seeing you again—my life seems to stop there—I see no further. You have absorb'd me. I have a sensation at the present moment as though I was dissolving—I should be exquisitely miserable without the hope of soon seeing you. I should be afraid to separate myself far from you. My sweet Fanny, will your heart

never change? My love, will it? I have no limit now to my love. . . . Your note came in just here. I cannot be happier away from you. 'Tis richer than an argosy of pearles. Do not threat me even in jest. I have been astonished that men could die martyrs for religion—I have shudder'd at it. I shudder no more. I could be martyr'd for my religion—love is my religion—I could die for that. I could die for you. My creed is love, and you are its only tenet. You have ravish'd me away by a power I cannot resist; and yet I could resist till I saw you; and even since I have seen you I have endeavoured often "to reason against the reasons of my love." I can do that no more—the pain would be too great. My love is selfish. I cannot breathe without you.

Yours for ever,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 9.

GREAT SMITH STREET, Tuesday Morn.

[Postmark, College Street, 19 October, 1819.]

MY SWEET FANNY:

On awakening from my three days' dream ("I cry to dream again") I find one and another astonished at my idleness and thoughtlessness. I was miserable last night—the morning is always restorative. I must be busy, or try to be so. I have several things to speak to you of to-morrow morning. Mrs. Dilke, I should think, will tell you that

I purpose living at Hampstead. I must impose chains upon myself. I shall be able to do nothing. I should like to cast the die for love or death. I have no patience with anything else. If you ever intend to be cruel to me, as you say in jest now, but perhaps may sometimes be in earnest, be so now—and I will—my mind is in a tremble, I cannot tell what I am writing.

Ever, my love, yours,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 10.

DEAREST FANNY :

I shall send this the moment you return. They say I must remain confined to this room for some time. The consciousness that you love me will make a pleasant prison of the house next to yours. You must come and see me frequently: this evening without fail—when you must not mind about my speaking in a low tone, for I am ordered to do so, though I *can* speak out.

Yours ever, sweetest love,

J. KEATS.

turn over

Perhaps your mother is not at home, and so you must wait till she comes. You must see me to-night, and let me hear you promise to come to-morrow.

Brown told me you were all out. I have been looking for the stage the whole afternoon. Had I known this I could not have remain'd so silent all day.

No. 11.

MY DEAREST GIRL :

If illness makes such an agreeable variety in the manner of your eyes I should wish you sometimes to be ill. I wish I had read your note before you went last night, that I might have assured you how far I was from suspecting any coldness. You had a just right to be a little silent to one who speaks so plainly to you. You must believe—you shall, you will—that I can do nothing, say nothing, think nothing of you but what has its spring in the love which has so long been my pleasure and torment. On the night I was taken ill—when so violent a rush of blood came to my lungs that I felt nearly suffocated—I assure you I felt it possible I might not survive, and at that moment thought of nothing but you. When I said to Brown, “This is unfortunate,” I thought of you. ’Tis true that since the first two or three days other subjects have entered my head. I shall be looking forward to health and the spring and a regular routine of our old walks.

Your affectionate

J. K.

No. 12.

MY SWEET LOVE :

I shall wait patiently till to-morrow before I see you, and in the mean time, if there is any need of such a thing, assure you by your beauty that whenever I have at any time written on a certain

unpleasant subject, it has been with your welfare impress'd upon my mind. How hurt I should have been had you ever acceded to what is, notwithstanding, very reasonable! How much the more do I love you from the general result! In my present state of health I feel too much separated from you, and could almost speak to you in the words of Lorenzo's Ghost to Isabella,—

"Your beauty grows upon me and I feel'
A greater love through all my essence steal."

My greatest torment since I have known you has been the fear of you being a little inclined to the Cressid; but that suspicion I dismiss utterly, and remain happy in the surety of your love, which I assure you is as much a wonder to me as a delight. Send me the words 'Good-night' to put under my pillow.

Dearest Fanny, your affectionate

J. K.

No. 13.

MY DEAREST GIRL:

According to all appearances, I am to be separated from you as much as possible. How I shall be able to bear it, or whether it will not be worse than your presence now and then, I cannot tell. I must be patient, and in the mean time you must think of it as little as possible. Let me not longer detain you from going to town—there may be no end to this imprisoning of you. Perhaps you had

better not come before to-morrow evening: send me, however, without fail a good-night.

You know our situation — what hope is there if I should be recovered ever so soon?—my very health will not suffer me to make any great exertion. I am recommended not even to read poetry, much less write it. I wish I had even a little hope. I cannot say forget me—but I would mention that there are impossibilities in the world. No more of this. I am not strong enough to be weaned — take no notice of it in your good-night.

Happen what may, I shall ever be, my dearest love,

Your affectionate

J. K.

No. 14.

MY DEAREST GIRL:

How could it ever have been my wish to forget you? How could I have said such a thing? The utmost stretch my mind has been capable of was to endeavour to forget you for your own sake, seeing what a chance there was of my remaining in a precarious state of health. I would have borne it as I would bear death if fate was in that humour: but I should as soon think of choosing to die as to part from you. Believe too, my love, that our friends think and speak for the best, and if their best is not our best it is not their fault. When I am better I will speak with you at large on these subjects, if there is any occasion—I think there is none. I am rather nervous to-day, perhaps from being a

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little recovered and suffering my mind to take little excursions beyond the doors and windows. I take it for a good sign, but as it must not be encouraged you had better delay seeing me till to-morrow. Do not take the trouble of writing much; merely send me my good-night.

Remember me to your mother and Margaret.

Your affectionate

J. K.

No. 15.

MY DEAREST FANNY:

Then all we have to do is to be patient. Whatever violence I may sometimes do myself by hinting at what would appear to any one but ourselves a matter of necessity, I do not think I could bear any approach of a thought of losing you. I slept well last night, but cannot say that I improve very fast. I shall expect you to-morrow, for it is certainly better that I should see you seldom. Let me have your good-night.

Your affectionate

J. K.

No. 16.

MY DEAREST FANNY:

I read your note in bed last night, and that might be the reason of my sleeping so much better. I think Mr. Brown is right in supposing you may stop too long with me, so very nervous as I am.

Send me every evening a written good-night. If you come for a few minutes about six, it may be the best time. Should you ever fancy me too low-spirited, I must warn you to ascribe it to the medicine I am at present taking, which is of a nerve-shaking nature. I shall impute any depression I may experience to this cause. I have been writing with a vile old pen the whole week, which is excessively ungallant. The fault is in the quill: I have mended it, and still it is very much inclin'd to make blind es. However, these last lines are in a much better style of penmanship, thof a little disfigured by the smear of black currant jelly, which has made a little mark on one of the pages of Brown's "Ben Jonson," the very best book he has. I have lick'd it, but it remains very purple. I did not know whether to say purple or blue, so in the mixture of the thought wrote purplue, which may be an excellent name for a colour made up of those two, and would suit well to start next spring. Be very careful of open doors and windows and going without your duffle grey. God bless you, love!

J. KEATS.

P. S.—I am sitting in the back room. Remember me to your mother.

No. 17.

MY DEAR FANNY :

Do not let your mother suppose that you hurt me by writing at night. For some reason or other your last night's note was not so treasureable as

former ones. I would fain that you call me *Love* still. To see you happy and in high spirits is a great consolation to me—still let me believe that you are not half so happy as my restoration would make you. I am nervous, I own, and may think myself worse than I really am; if so, you must indulge me, and pamper with that sort of tenderness you have manifested towards me in different letters. My sweet creature, when I look back upon the pains and torments I have suffer'd for you from the day I left you to go to the Isle of Wight; the ecstasies in which I have pass'd some days and the miseries in their turn, I wonder the more at the beauty which has kept up the spell so fervently. When I send this round I shall be in the front parlour watching to see you show yourself for a minute in the garden. How illness stands as a barrier betwixt me and you! Even if I was well—I must make myself as good a philosopher as possible. Now I have had opportunities of passing nights anxious and awake, I have found other thoughts intrude upon me. "If I should die," said I to myself, "I have left no immortal work behind me—nothing to make my friends proud of my memory—but I have lov'd the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remember'd." Thoughts like these came very feebly whilst I was in health and every pulse beat for you—now you divide with this (may I say it?) "last infirmity of noble minds" all my reflection.

God bless you, love,

J. KEATS.

No. 18.

MY DEAREST GIRL:

You spoke of having been unwell in your last note: have you recover'd? That note has been a great delight to me. I am stronger than I was: the doctors say there is very little the matter with me, but I cannot believe them till the weight and tightness of my chest is mitigated. I will not indulge or pain myself by complaining of my long separation from you. God alone knows whether I am destined to taste of happiness with you; at all events I myself know thus much, that I consider it no mean happiness to have lov'd you thus far. If it is to be no further I shall not be unthankful—if I am to recover, the day of my recovery shall see me by your side, from which nothing shall separate me. If well, you are the only medicine that can keep me so. Perhaps, aye surely, I am writing in too depress'd a state of mind. Ask your mother to come and see me—she will bring you a better account than mine.

Ever your affectionate

JOHN KEATS.

No. 19.

MY DEAREST GIRL:

Indeed, I will not deceive you with respect to my health. This is the fact as far as I know. I have been confined three weeks and am not yet well—this proves that there is something wrong

about me which my constitution will either conquer or give way to. Let us hope for the best. Do you hear the thrush singing over the field? I think it is a sign of mild weather — so much the better for me. Like all sinners, now I am ill I philosophize, aye out of my attachment to every thing, trees, flowers, thrushes, spring, summer, claret, &c., &c.— aye, every thing but you. My sister would be glad of my company a little longer. That thrush is a fine fellow. I hope he was fortunate in his choice this year. Do not send any more of my books home. I have a great pleasure in the thought of you looking on them.

Ever yours, my sweet Fanny,

J. K.

No. 20.

MY DEAREST GIRL:

I continue much the same as usual, I think a little better. My spirits are better also, and consequently I am more resign'd to my confinement. I dare not think of you much or write much to you. Remember me to all.

Ever your affectionate

JOHN KEATS.

No. 21.

MY DEAR FANNY:

I think you had better not make any long stay with me when Mr. Brown is at home. Whenever

he goes out you may bring your work. You will have a pleasant walk to-day. I shall see you pass. I shall follow you with my eyes over the heath. Will you come towards evening, instead of before dinner? When you are gone, 'tis past—if you do not come till the evening I have something to look forward to all day. Come round to my window for a moment when you have read this. Thank your mother, for the preserves, for me. The raspberry will be too sweet, not having any acid; therefore, as you are so good a girl, I shall make you a present of it. Good-bye,

My sweet love!

J. KEATS.

No. 22.

MY DEAREST FANNY:

The power of your benediction is of not so weak a nature as to pass from the ring in four and twenty hours—it is like a sacred chalice once consecrated and ever consecrate. I shall kiss your name and mine where your lips have been—lips! why should a poor prisoner as I am talk about such things? Thank God, though I hold them the dearest pleasures in the universe, I have a consolation independent of them in the certainty of your affection. I could write a song in the style of Tom Moore's pathetic about memory if that would be any relief to me. No—'twould not. I will be as obstinate as a robin; I will not sing in a cage. Health is my expected heaven and you are the houri—this word

I believe is both singular and plural,—if only plural, never mind—you are a thousand of them.

Ever yours affectionately, my dearest,

J. K.

You had better not come to-day.

No. 23.

MY DEAREST LOVE:

You must not stop so long in the cold—I have been suspecting that window to be open. Your note half cured me. When I want some more oranges I will tell you—these are just *à propos*. I am kept from food, so feel rather weak—otherwise, very well. Pray do not stop so long upstairs—it makes me uneasy; come every now and then and stop a half minute. Remember me to your mother.

Your ever affectionate

J. KEATS.

No. 24.

SWEETEST FANNY:

You fear, sometimes, I do not love you so much as you wish? My dear girl, I love you ever and ever and without reserve. The more I have known the more have I lov'd. In every way—even my jealousies have been agonies of love; in the hottest fit I ever had I would have died for you. I

have vex'd you too much. But for love! Can I help it? You are always new. The last of your kisses was ever the sweetest; the last smile the brightest; the last movement the gracefulest. When you pass'd my window home yesterday, I was fill'd with as much admiration as if I had then seen you for the first time. You uttered a half complaint once that I only lov'd your beauty. Have I nothing else, then, to love in you but that? Do not I see a heart naturally furnish'd with wings imprison itself with me? No ill prospect has been able to turn your thoughts a moment from me. This, perhaps, should be as much a subject of sorrow as joy,—but I will not talk of that. Even if you did not love me I could not help an entire devotion to you: how much more deeply, then, must I feel for you, knowing you love me. My mind has been the most discontented and restless one that ever was put into a body too small for it. I never felt my mind repose upon anything with complete and undistracted enjoyment—upon no person but you. When you are in the room my thoughts never fly out of window: you always concentrate my whole senses. The anxiety shown about our loves in your last note is an immense pleasure to me; however, you must not suffer such speculations to molest you any more: nor will I any more believe you can have the least pique against me. Brown is gone out—but here is Mrs. Wylie. When she is gone I shall be awake for you. Remembrances to your mother.

Your affectionate

J. KEATS.

No. 25.

MY DEAR FANNY:

I am much better this morning than I was a week ago ; indeed, I improve a little every day. I rely upon taking a walk with you upon the first of May : in the mean time undergoing a Babylonish captivity, I shall not be Jew enough to hang up my harp upon a willow, but rather endeavour to clear up my arrears in versifying, and with returning health begin upon something new : pursuant to which resolution it will be necessary to have my, or rather Taylor's, manuscript, which you, if you please, will send by my messenger either to-day or to-morrow. Is Mr. D. with you to-day? You appeared very much fatigued last night : you must look a little brighter this morning. I shall not suffer my little girl ever to be obscured like glass breath'd upon, but always bright, as it is her *nature to*. Feeding upon sham victuals and sitting by the fire will completely annul me. I have no need of an enchanted wax figure to duplicate me, for I am melting in my proper person before the fire. If you meet with anything better (worse) than common in your magazines let me see it.

Good-bye, my sweetest girl.

J. K.

No. 26.

MY DEAREST FANNY:

Whenever you know me to be alone, come, no matter what day. Why will you go out this

weather? I shall not fatigue myself with writing too much, I promise you. Brown says I am getting stouter. I rest well, and from last night do not remember anything horrid in my dream, which is a capital symptom, for any organic derangement always occasions a phantasmagoria. It will be a nice idle amusement to hunt after a motto for my book, which I will have if lucky enough to hit upon a fit one—not intending to write a preface. I fear I am too late with my note—you are gone out—you will be as cold as a topsail in a north latitude—I advise you to furl yourself and come in a doors.

Good-bye, love.

J. K.

No. 27.

MY DEAREST FANNY:

I slept well last night, and am no worse this morning for it. Day by day, if I am not deceived, I get a more unrestrain'd use of my chest. The nearer a racer gets to the goal the more his anxiety becomes; so I, lingering upon the borders of health, feel my impatience increase. Perhaps on your account I have imagined my illness more serious than it is: how horrid was the chance of slipping into the ground instead of into your arms—the difference is amazing, love. Death must come at last; man must die, as Shallow says; but before that is my fate I fain would try what more pleasures than you have given, so sweet a creature as you can give. Let me have another opportunity of years before me and I will not die without being

remember'd. Take care of yourself, dear, that we may both be well in the summer. I do not at all fatigue myself with writing, having merely to put a line or two here and there, a task which would worry a stout state of the body and mind, but which just suits me, as I can do no more.

Your affectionate

J. K.

No. 28.

MY DEAREST FANNY:

I had a better night last night than I have had since my attack, and this morning I am the same as when you saw me. I have been turning over two volumes of letters written between Rousseau and two ladies in the perplexed strain of mingled finesse and sentiment in which the ladies and gentlemen of those days were so clever, and which is still prevalent among ladies of this country who live in a state of reasoning romance. The likeness however only extends to the mannerism, not to the dexterity. What would Rousseau have said at seeing our little correspondence! What would his ladies have said! I don't care much — I would sooner have Shakspeare's opinion about the matter. The common gossiping of washerwomen must be less disgusting than the continual and eternal fence and attack of Rousseau and these sublime petticoats. One calls herself Clara and her friend Julia, two of Rousseau's heroines. They all [*sic*, but *qy. ar*] the same time christen poor Jean Jacques St.

Preux—who is the pure cavalier of his famous novel. Thank God I am born in England, with our own great men before my eyes. Thank God that you are fair and can love me without being letter-written and sentimentaliz'd into it. Mr. Barry Cornwall has sent me another book, his first, with a polite note. I must do what I can to make him sensible of the esteem I have for his kindness. If this north-east would take a turn it would be so much the better for me. Good-bye, my love, my dear love, my beauty—

Love me for ever.

J. K.

No. 29.

MY DEAREST FANNY :

Though I shall see you in so short a time, I cannot forbear sending you a few lines. You say I did not give you yesterday a minute account of my health. To-day I have left off the medicine which I took to keep the pulse down, and I find I can do very well without it, which is a very favourable sign, as it shows there is no inflammation remaining. You think I may be wearied at night, you say : it is my best time ; I am at my best about eight o'clock. I received a note from Mr. Procter to-day. He says he cannot pay me a visit this weather, as he is fearful of an inflammation in the chest. What a horrid climate this is, or what careless inhabitants it has ! You are one of them. My dear girl, do not make a joke of it ; do not expose yourself to the cold.

There's the thrush again — I can't afford it — he'll run me up a pretty bill for music — besides, he ought to know I deal at Clementi's. How can you bear so long an imprisonment at Hampstead? I shall always remember it with all the gusto that a monopolizing carle should. I could build an altar to you for it.

Your affectionate

J. K.

No. 30.

MY DEAREST GIRL:

As from the last part of my note you must see how gratified I have been by your remaining at home, you might perhaps conceive that I was equally bias'd the other way by your going to town, I cannot be easy to-night without telling you you would be wrong to suppose so. Though I am pleased with the one, I am not displeased with the other. How do I dare to write in this manner about my pleasures and displeasures? I will tho' whilst I am an invalid, in spite of you. Good-night, love!

J. K.

No. 31.

MY DEAREST GIRL:

In consequence of our company, I suppose I shall not see you before to-morrow. I am much better to-day — indeed, all I have to complain of is

want of strength and a little tightness in the chest. I envied Sam's walk with you to-day, which I will not do again, as I may get very tired of envying. I imagine you now sitting in your new black dress, which I like so much, and if I were a little less selfish and more enthusiastic I should run round and surprise you with a knock at the door. I fear I am too prudent for a dying kind of lover. Yet there is a great difference between going off in warm blood, like Romeo, and making one's exit like a frog in a frost. I had nothing particular to say to-day, but not intending that there shall be any interruption to our correspondence (which at some future time I propose offering to Murray), I write something. God bless you, my sweet love! Illness is a long lane, but I see you at the end of it, and shall mend my pace as well as possible.

J. K.

No. 32.

DEAR GIRL:

Yesterday you must have thought me worse than I really was. I assure you there was nothing but regret at being obliged to forego an embrace which has so many times been the highest gust of my life. I would not care for health without it. Sam would not come in—I wanted merely to ask him how you were this morning. When one is not quite well, we turn for relief to those we love: this is no weakness of spirit in me: you know when in health I thought of nothing but you; when I shall again be so it will be the same. Brown has been mentioning

to me that some hint from Sam, last night, occasions him some uneasiness. He whispered something to you concerning Brown and old Mr. Dilke which had the complexion of being something derogatory to the former. It was connected with an anxiety about Mr. D. Sr.'s death, and an anxiety to set out for Chichester. These sort of hints point out their own solution: one cannot pretend to a delicate ignorance on the subject: you understand the whole matter. If any one, my sweet love, has misrepresented to you, to your mother, or Sam, any circumstances which are at all likely, at a tenth remove, to create suspicions among people who, from their own interested notions, slander others, pray tell me: for I feel the least attaint on the disinterested character of Brown very deeply. Perhaps Reynolds or some other of my friends may come towards evening; therefore, you may choose whether you will come to see me early to-day, before or after dinner, as you may think fit. Remember me to your mother, and tell her to drag you to me if you show the least reluctance —

* * * * *

No. 33.

MY DEAREST GIRL :

I endeavour to make myself as patient as possible. Hunt amuses me very kindly—besides, I have your ring on my finger and your flowers on the table. I shall not expect to see you yet, because it would be so much pain to part with you again.



THE GRAVE OF KEATS.

IN THE PROTESTANT CEMETERY AT ROME.

When the books you want come, you shall have them. I am very well this afternoon. My dearest . . .

[Signature cut off.]

No. 34.

TUESDAY AFTERNOON.

MY DEAREST FANNY:

For this week past I have been employed in marking the most beautiful passages in Spenser, intending it for you, and comforting myself in being somehow occupied to give you however small a pleasure. It has lightened my time very much. I am much better. God bless you.

Your affectionate

J. KEATS.

No. 35.

WEDNESDAY MORNING.

MY DEAREST FANNY:

I have been a walk this morning with a book in my hand, but as usual I have been occupied with nothing but you: I wish I could say in an agreeable manner. I am tormented day and night. They talk of my going to Italy. 'Tis certain I shall never recover if I am to be so long separate from you: yet, with all this devotion to you, I cannot persuade myself into any confidence of you.

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Past experience, connected with the fact of my long separation from you, gives me agonies which are scarcely to be talked of. When your mother comes I shall be very sudden and expert in asking her whether you have been to Mrs. Dilke's, for she might say no to make me easy. I am literally worn to death, which seems my only recourse. I cannot forget what has pass'd. What? nothing with a man of the world, but to me deathful. I will get rid of this as much as possible. When you were in the habit of flirting with Brown you would have left off, could your own heart have felt one half of one pang mine did. Brown is a good sort of man—he did not know he was doing me to death by inches. I feel the effect of every one of those hours in my side now; and for that cause, though he has done me many services, though I know his love and friendship for me, though at this moment I should be without pence were it not for his assistance, I will never see or speak to him until we are both old men, if we are to be. I *will* resent my heart having been made a football. You will call this madness. I have heard you say that it was not unpleasant to wait a few years. You have amusements—your mind is away—you have not brooded over one idea as I have, and how should you? You are to me an object intensely desirable—the air I breathe in a room empty of you is unhealthy. I am not the same to you—no—you can wait—you have a thousand activities—you can be happy without me. Any party, any thing to fill up the day has been enough. How have you pass'd this month? Who have you smil'd with?

All this may seem savage in me. You do not feel as I do—you do not know what it is to love—one day you may—your time is not come. Ask yourself how many unhappy hours Keats has caused you in loneliness. For myself, I have been a martyr the whole time, and for this reason I speak; the confession is forc'd from me by the torture. I appeal to you by the blood of that Christ you believe in, do not write to me if you have done anything this month which it would have pained me to have seen. You may have altered. If you have not, if you still behave in dancing rooms and other societies as I have seen you, I do not want to live; if you have done so, I wish this coming night may be my last. I cannot live without you, and not only you, but *chaste you—virtuous you*. The sun rises and sets, the day passes, and you follow the bent of your inclination to a certain extent; you have no conception of the quantity of miserable feeling that passes through me in a day. Be serious! Love is not a plaything—and, again, do not write unless you can do it with a crystal conscience. I would sooner die for want of you than——

Yours for ever,

J. KEATS.

No. 36.

MY DEAREST FANNY:

My head is puzzled this morning, and I scarce know what I shall say, though I am full of a hundred things. 'Tis certain I would rather be writing

to you this morning, notwithstanding the alloy of grief in such an occupation, than enjoy any other pleasure, with health to boot, unconnected with you. Upon my soul, I have loved you to the extreme. I wish you could know the tenderness with which I continually brood over your different aspects of countenance, action, and dress. I see you come down in the morning: I see you meet me at the window—I see every thing over again eternally that I ever have seen. If I get on the pleasant clue I live in a sort of happy misery, if on the unpleasant, 'tis miserable misery. You complain of my ill-treating you in word, thought, and deed. I am sorry—at times I feel bitterly sorry that I ever made you unhappy; my excuse is that those words have been wrung from me by the sharpness of my feelings. At all events and in any case, I have been wrong; could I believe that I did it without any cause, I should be the most sincere of penitents. I could give way to my repentant feelings now, I could recant all my suspicions, I could mingle with you heart and soul though absent, were it not for some parts of your letters. Do you suppose it possible I could ever leave you? You know what I think of myself and what of you. You know that I should feel how much it was my loss and how little yours. My friends laugh at you! I know some of them—when I know them all I shall never think of them again as friends or even acquaintance. My friends have behaved well to me in every instance but one, and there they have become tattlers, and inquisitors into my conduct: spying upon a secret I would rather die than share

it with anybody's confidence. For this I cannot wish them well; I care not to see any of them again. If I am the theme, I will not be the friend of idle gossips. Good gods, what a shame it is our loves should be so put into the microscope of a coterie! Their laughs should not affect you (I may perhaps give you reasons some day for these laughs, for I suspect a few people to hate me well enough, *for reasons I know of*, who have pretended a great friendship for me) when in competition with one, who, if he never should see you again, would make you the saint of his memory. These laughers, who do not like you, who envy you for your beauty, who would have God-bless'd me from you for ever, who were plying me with discouragements with respect to you eternally. People are revengeful: do not mind them — do nothing but love me. If I knew that for certain, life and health will in such event be a heaven, and death itself will be less painful. I long to believe in immortality. I shall never be able to bid you an entire farewell. If I am destined to be happy with you here — how short is the longest life. I wish to believe in immortality — I wish to live with you for ever. Do not let my name ever pass between you and those laughers; if I have no other merit than the great love for you, that were sufficient to keep me sacred and unmentioned in such society. If I have been cruel and unjust, I swear my love has ever been greater than my cruelty, which last [*sic*] but a minute; whereas my love, come what will, shall last for ever. If concession to me has hurt your pride, God knows I have had little pride in my heart when thinking of you. Your name never

passes my lips — do not let mine pass yours. Those people do not like me. After reading my letter, you even then wish to see me. I am strong enough to walk over — but I dare not. I shall feel so much pain in parting with you again. My dearest love, I am afraid to see you ; I am strong, but not strong enough to see you. Will my arm be ever round you again, and if so shall I be obliged to leave you again ? My sweet love ! I am happy whilst I believe your first letter. Let me be but certain that you are mine heart and soul, and I could die more happily than I could otherwise live. If you think me cruel — if you think I have sleighted you — do muse it over again and see into my heart. My love to you is “true as truth’s simplicity and simpler than the infancy of truth,” as I think I once said before. How could I sleight you ? How threaten to leave you ? not in the spirit of a threat to you — no — but in the spirit of wretchedness in myself. My fairest, my delicious, my angel Fanny ! do not believe me such a vulgar fellow. I will be as patient in illness and as believing in love as I am able.

Yours for ever, my dearest,

JOHN KEATS.

No. 37.

I do not write this till the last,
that no eye may catch it.

MY DEAREST GIRL :

I wish you could invent some means to make me at all happy without you. Every hour I am more

and more concentrated in you; everything else tastes like chaff in my mouth. I feel it almost impossible to go to Italy—the fact is I cannot leave you, and shall never taste one minute's content until it pleases chance to let me live with you for good. But I will not go on at this rate. A person in health, as you are, can have no conception of the horrors that nerves and a temper like mine go through. What island do your friends propose retiring to? I should be happy to go with you there alone, but in company I should object to it; the backbitings and jealousies of new colonists who have nothing else to amuse themselves, is unbearable. Mr. Dilke came to see me yesterday, and gave me a very great deal more pain than pleasure. I shall never be able any more to endure the society of any of those who used to meet at Elm Cottage and Wentworth Place. The last two years taste like brass upon my palate. If I cannot live with you I will live alone. I do not think my health will improve much while I am separated from you. For all this I am averse to seeing you—I cannot bear flashes of light and return into my gloom again. I am not so unhappy now as I should be if I had seen you yesterday. To be happy with you seems such an impossibility! it requires a luckier star than mine! it will never be. I enclose a passage from one of your letters, which I want you to alter a little—I want (if you will have it so) the matter express'd less coldly to me. If my health would bear it, I could write a poem which I have in my head, which would be a consolation for people in such a situation as mine. I would show

some one in love as I am, with a person living in such liberty as you do. Shakespeare always sums up matters in the most sovereign manner. Hamlet's heart was full of such misery as mine is when he said to Ophelia, "Go to a nunnery, go, go!" Indeed, I should like to give up the matter at once—I should like to die. I am sickened at the brute world which you are smiling with. I hate men, and women more. I see nothing but thorns for the future. Wherever I may be next winter, in Italy or nowhere, Brown will be living near you with his indecencies. I see no prospect of any rest. Suppose me in Rome—well, I should there see you as in a magic glass going to and from town at all hours, —— I wish you could infuse a little confidence of human nature into my heart. I cannot muster any—the world is too brutal for me. I am glad there is such a thing as the grave—I am sure I shall never have any rest till I get there. At any rate, I will indulge myself by never seeing any more Dilke or Brown or any of their friends. I wish I was either in your arms, full of faith, or that a thunder bolt would strike me.

God bless you.

J. K.





SEVERN'S ACCOUNT OF THE DEATH OF KEATS

IN September, 1820, Keats's health was so much broken that his physicians advised that he go to Italy, hoping that a gentler climate might lengthen his life. He accordingly started on his journey, accompanied by his faithful friend Joseph Severn, the painter. The journey was delayed by storms and a quarantine of ten days at Naples. His health, when he arrived in Naples, was in no way mended. At Naples he received a pressing invitation from Shelley to visit him at Pisa. The travelers pressed on to Rome, however, where Keats was taken in charge by Dr. (afterward Sir James) Clark, who was all kindness and attention to the sufferer. The last letter written by Keats was that to Mr. Brown, from Rome, and dated November 30, 1820. That letter gives some

account of his health. In describing the last few days I can do no better than transcribe from Lord Houghton's book the extracts taken from the letters of Mr. Severn, who wrote, on the 14th of December:

"Dec. 14th.—I fear poor Keats is at his worst. A most unlooked-for relapse has confined him to his bed, with every chance against him. It has been so sudden upon what I thought convalescence, and without any seeming cause, that I cannot calculate on the next change. I dread it, for his suffering is so great, so continued, and his fortitude so completely gone, that any further change must make him delirious. This is the fifth day, and I see him get worse.

"Dec. 17th, 4 A. M.—Not a moment can I be from him. I sit by his bed and read all day, and at night I humour him in all his wanderings. He has just fallen asleep, the first sleep for eight nights, and now from mere exhaustion. I hope he will not wake till I have written, for I am anxious you should know the truth; yet I dare not let him see I think his state dangerous. On the morning of his attack he was going on in good spirits, quite merrily, when, in an instant, a cough seized him, and he vomited two cupfulls of blood. In a moment I got Dr. Clark, who took eight ounces of blood from his arm—it was black and thick. Keats was much alarmed and dejected. What a sorrowful day I had with him! He rushed out of bed and said, 'This day shall be my last'; and

but for me most certainly it would. The blood broke forth in similar quantity the next morning, and he was bled again. I was afterwards so fortunate as to talk him into a little calmness, and he soon became quite patient. Now the blood has come up in coughing, five times. Not a single thing will he digest, yet he keeps on craving for food. Every day he raves he will die from hunger, and I've been obliged to give him more than was allowed. His imagination and memory present every thought to him in horror; the recollection of 'his good friend Brown,' of 'his four happy weeks spent under *her* care,' of his sister and brother. O! he will mourn over all to me whilst I cool his burning forehead, till I tremble for his intellects. How can he be 'Keats' again after all this? Yet I may see it too gloomily, since each coming night I sit up adds its dismal contents to my mind.

"Dr. Clark will not say much; although there are no bounds to his attention, yet he can with little success 'administer to a mind diseased.' All that can be done he does most kindly, while his lady, like himself in refined feeling, prepares all that poor Keats takes, for in this wilderness of a place, for an invalid, there was no alternative. Yesterday, Dr. Clark went all over Rome for a certain kind of fish, and just as I received it carefully dressed, Keats was taken with spitting of blood. We have the best opinion of Dr. Clark's skill: he comes over four or five times a day, and he has left word for us to call him up, at any moment, in case of danger. My spirits have been quite pulled down. These wretched Romans have no idea of comfort. I am

obliged to do everything for him. I wish you were here.

"I have just looked at him. This will be a good night.

"Jan. 15th, 1821, half-past Eleven.—Poor Keats has just fallen asleep. I have watched him and read to him to his very last wink; he has been saying to me—'Severn, I can see under your quiet look immense contention; you don't know what you are reading. You are enduring for me more than I would have you. O! that my last hour was come!' He is sinking daily; perhaps another three weeks may lose him to me for ever! I made sure of his recovery when we set out. I was selfish; I thought of his value to me; I made my own public success to depend on his candour to me.¹

¹ The following letter indicates that Severn recognized that, for his sacrifices for his friend, he received at least some return:

ROME, Sept. 1st, 1863.

MY DEAR MADAM:

This is a line to assure you that I am the "one devoted friend until death" of your illustrious relative, John Keats, and that it has gratified me highly to be addressed by you in consequence of your reading my essay "On the vicissitudes of Keats's fame," as I had the happiness to meet his sister here (Madam d'Llanos) after forty-five years! I trust it may be also my happiness to meet some news of his family in

Rome, where I am likely to remain all my life, and where I first came in his dear company in Nov., 1820, and on his account—altho' on my part so mad a thing as it seemed at the time and was pronounced so by most of my friends; yet it was the best and perhaps the only step to insure my artistic career, which no doubt was watched and blessed by this dear spirit, for I remained twenty years without returning to England, and during that time the patrons I most valued came to me as "the friend of Keats." These have remained faithful to me and mine, no doubt inspired by the revered name Poet. The success of my family (three sons and

"Torlonia, the banker, has refused us any more money; the bill is returned unaccepted, and to-morrow I must pay my last crown for this cursed lodging-place: and what is more, if he dies all the beds and furniture will be burnt and the walls scraped, and they will come on me for a hundred pounds or more! But, above all, this noble fellow lying on the bed and without the common spiritual comforts that many a rogue and fool has in his last moments! If I do break down it will be under this; but I pray that some angel of goodness may yet lead him through this dark wilderness.

"If I could leave Keats every day for a time I could soon raise money by my painting; but he will not let me out of his sight, he will not bear the face of a stranger. I would rather cut my tongue out than tell him I must get the money—that would kill him at a word. You see my hopes of being kept by the Royal Academy will be cut off, unless I send a picture by the spring. I have written to Sir T. Lawrence. I have got a volume of Jeremy Taylor's works, which Keats has heard me read to-

three daughters) has turned on this. The chief of these patrons I may mention is the present Chancellor of the Exchequer (William Gladstone).

At this moment I only know of two personal friends of the poet besides myself to be now living—Mr. Charles Cowden Clarke, who is at Genoa (Villa Novello Strada Alla Cara Genoa), and Mr. John Taylor (the publisher), in London.

It may be also that friends of yours may chance to be visiting Rome, and in that case I beg you to give them a note to me. This quiet note, I fear, may find you in the midst of war's misery, if it ever finds you at all, and I hope it may be the means of procuring me another letter from you or yours to yours most truly,

JOSEPH SEVERN.

For Mrs. Speed.

night. This is a treasure indeed, and came when I should have thought it hopeless. Why may not other good things come? I will keep myself up with such hopes. Dr. Clark is still the same, though he knows about the bill: he is afraid the next change will be to diarrhœa. Keats sees all this—his knowledge of anatomy makes every change tenfold worse; every way he is unfortunate, yet every one offers me assistance on his account. He cannot read any letters; he has made me put them by him unopened. They tear him to pieces—he dare not look on the outside of any more: make this known.

"Feb. 18th.—I have just got your letter of Jan. 15th. The contrast of your quiet friendly Hampstead with this lonely place and our poor suffering Keats, brings the tears into my eyes. I wish many, many times that he had never left you. His recovery would have been impossible in England; but his excessive grief has made it equally so here. In your care he seemed to me like an infant in its mother's arms; you would have smoothed down his pain by variety of interests, and his death would have been eased by the presence of many friends. Here, with one solitary friend, in a place savage for an invalid, he has one more pang added to his many—for I have had the hardest task in keeping from him my painful situation. I have kept him alive week after week. He has refused all food, and I have prepared his meals six times a day, till he had no excuse left. I have only dared to leave him while he slept. It is impossible to conceive what his sufferings have been: he might,

in his anguish, have plunged into the grave in secret, and not a syllable been known about him : this reflection alone repays me for all I have done. Now, he is still alive and calm. He would not hear that he was better : the thought of recovery is beyond every thing dreadful to him ; we now dare not perceive any improvement, for the hope of death seems his only comfort. He talks of the quiet grave as the first rest he can ever have.

“In the last week a great desire for books came across his mind. I got him all I could, and three days this charm lasted, but now it has gone. Yet he is very tranquil. He is more and more reconciled to his horrible misfortunes.

“*Feb. 14th.*—Little or no change has taken place, excepting this beautiful one, that his mind is growing to great quietness and peace. I find this change has to do with the increasing weakness of his body, but to me it seems like a delightful sleep,—I have been beating about in the tempest of his mind so long. To-night he has talked very much, but so easily that he fell at last into a pleasant sleep. He seems to have happy dreams. This will bring on some change; it cannot be worse—it may be better. Among the many things he has requested of me to-night, this is the principal — that on his grave-stone shall be this inscription :

‘HERE LIES ONE WHOSE NAME WAS WRIT IN WATER.’

You will understand this so well that I need not say a word about it.

"When he first came here he purchased a copy of 'Alfieri,' but put it down at the second page—being much affected at the lines

'Misera me! sollievo a me non resta,
Altro che il pianto, ed il pianto è delitto!'

Now that I know so much of his grief, I do not wonder at it.

"Such a letter has come! I gave it to Keats, supposing it to be one of yours, but it proved sadly otherwise. The glance at that letter tore him to pieces; the effects were on him for many days. He did not read it—he could not—but requested me to place it in his coffin, together with a purse and a letter (unopened) of his sister's. Since then he has told me *not* to place that letter in his coffin, only his sister's purse and letter, and some hair. I however persuaded him to think otherwise on this point. In his most irritable state he sees a friendless world about him, with every thing that his life presents, and especially the kindness of others, tending to his melancholy death.

"I have got an English nurse to come two hours every other day, so that I am quite recovering my health. Keats seems to like her, but she has been taken ill to-day and cannot come. In a little back room I get chalking out a picture; this, with swallowing a little Italian every day, helps to keep me up. The Doctor is delighted with your kindness to Keats; he thinks him worse; his lungs are in a dreadful state; his stomach has lost all its power. Keats knew from the first little drop of blood that

he must die ; no common chance of living was left him.

" Feb. 22nd.— O! how anxious I am to hear from you! [Mr. Haslam.] I have nothing to break this dreadful solitude but letters. Day after day, night after night, here I am by our poor dying friend. My spirits, my intellect, and my health are breaking down. I can get no one to change with me—no one to relieve me. All run away, and even if they did not, Keats would not do without me.

"Last night I thought he was going; I could hear the phlegm in his throat; he bade me lift him up in the bed or he would die with pain. I watched him all night, expecting him to be suffocated at every cough. This morning, by the pale daylight, the change in him frightened me: he has sunk in the last three days to a most ghastly look. Though Dr. Clark has prepared me for the worst, I shall be ill able to bear it. I cannot bear to be set free, even from this my horrible situation, by the loss of him.

"I am still quite precluded from painting, which may be of consequence to me. Poor Keats has me ever by him, and shadows out the form of one solitary friend: he opens his eyes in great doubt and horror, but when they fall upon me they close gently, open quietly and close again, till he sinks to sleep. This thought alone would keep me by him till he dies: and why did I say I was losing my time? The advantages I have gained by knowing John Keats are double and treble any I could have won by any other occupation. Farewell.

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"*Feb. 27th.*—He is gone; he died with the most perfect ease—he seemed to go to sleep. On the twenty-third, about four, the approaches of death came on. 'Severn—I—lift me up—I am dying—I shall die easy; don't be frightened—be firm, and thank God it has come.' I lifted him up in my arms. The phlegm seemed boiling in his throat, and increased until eleven, when he gradually sunk into death, so quiet, that I still thought he slept. I cannot say more now. I am broken down by four nights' watching, no sleep since, and my poor Keats gone. Three days since the body was opened; the lungs were completely gone. The doctors could not imagine how he had lived these two months. I followed his dear body to the grave on Monday, with many English.¹ They take much care of me here—I must else have gone into a fever. I am better now, but still quite disabled.

"The police have been. The furniture, the walls, the floor, must all be destroyed and changed; but this is well looked to by Dr. Clark.

"The letters I placed in the coffin with my own hand.

"This goes by the first post. Some of my kind friends would else have written before."

¹ Joseph Severn died at Rome in 1879. He was buried by the side of Keats. A similar head-stone to that marking Keats's grave was erected, and a boxwood hedge placed around the graves. On Severn's head-stone there is a palette in the place of the harp upon Keats's.

1887 *Keats*

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